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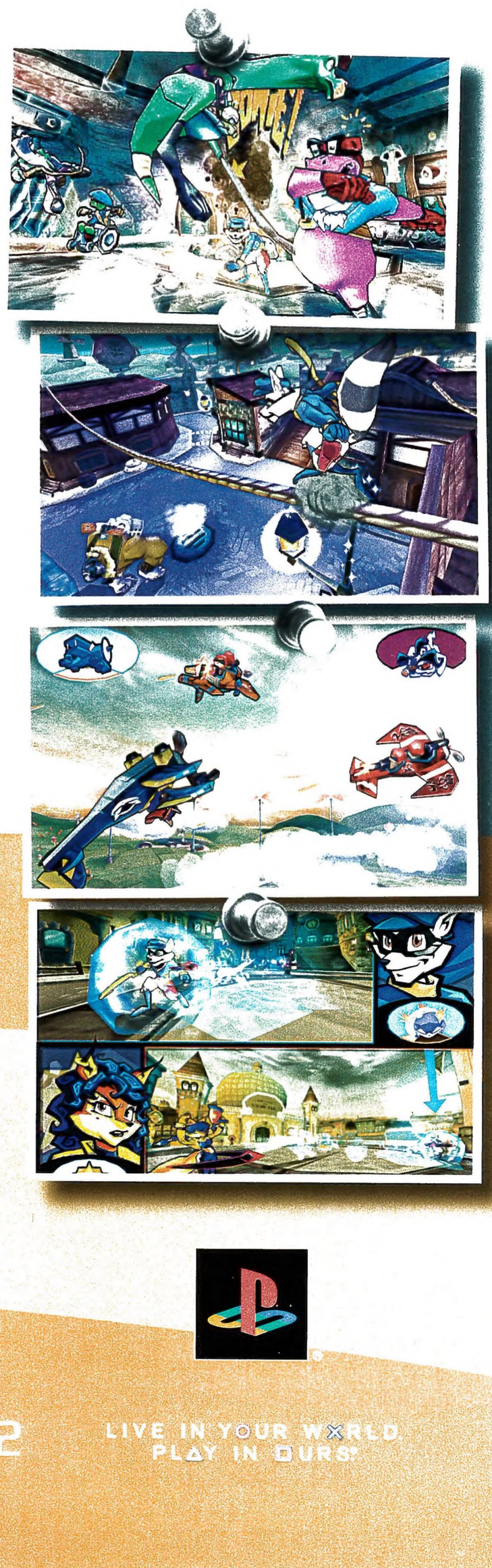

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Letter from the Editor

Control

What's the first thing you do when you fire up a new game, once the opening movie finally sets you free? If you're like me you run the character around to see how he, she, or it feels and what the camera is like… whether you can rotate it 360, whether or not it's tethered to the character's backside or free, etc... For me this is the most crucial point in any game because if I'm going to spend 20 or so hours staring at who or whatever, it had better look and feel pretty damn spectacular. So then, being one of the most basic, fundamental, and crucial parts of game creation, why do so many developers get it wrong? Even if a character looks good and has proper physics—which is about 50% of the time—95% of the time the character's feet and legs won't be dynamic to the slopes (and stairs) of the game. Come to a rest on a slope and in go the toes and up go the heels…it's almost as bad as using the same animation routine for running up (or worse, down) stairs that you use for flat surfaces… and then there's turning arcs. When a character turns it should affect the animation with a slight lean, just as when a character changes direction there should be transition. And FPSs aren't off the hook either. Look down in Perfect Dark Zero and…no feet! This is next gen? Whenever I receive one of these broken games where the character animates as if it had a merry-go-round pole shoved vertically through its torso I make it a point to contact whomever will listen, and almost always get the same reaction… "Great point Dave, but we didn't think of it early on and it's too late to implement it now…" Either that or, "Well, it was either incorporate that or spend the resources getting something else in," which to me is a huge cop out. I'm not one to choose sides, but tell that to the publisher whose lead character looks like a pirouetting mannequin because you wanted physics on the chairs. This is the lead character after all. Should there be any choice? Is it really that difficult? I wondered… So I took my query to the top and asked one of the most skilled game creators in the world: Team Ninja's Tomonobu Itagaki, maker of the finest in-game models in the known universe, who chuckled and simply said, "It's 7th grade math," then proceeded to pull out some scratch paper and draw me the calculations… So if it's that easy, and developers are forgetting or neglecting to incorporate it now, won't these same developers keep right on doing it into the next generation of games? This would be most unfortunate. If I'm negotiating stairs via flat sprint animation next year, I'm going to be really disappointed... And I haven't even touched on physics; another aspect of game creation nearly everyone gets wrong. Some characters don't even have walking animation; what the hell is that? If this all sounds like the ramblings of a madman to you here's the top of the scale so you can do your own research: For physics look no further than Maximo (Mr. Dave Siller is one of the true masters of character design and physics); Jak, Oddworld's Stranger, Kratos from God of War, or either Liu Kang or Kung Lao in Shaolin Monks (masterworks of precision control). For slope sensitivity check out Windwaker, Ninja Gaiden, Primal's Jen (champion of the cause and underrated game of the millennium) or Splinter Cell Chaos Theory. Notice a trend here? These are all stunning games. So I know it's not just me…or is it? Is this bug up your butt too?

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Copy Editor **Zach Korwin**
Photographer **Michael Tran**

Design

Art Director **Michael Hobbs**
Associate Art Director **Chin "Nelson" Lui**

Advertising and Sales

Publisher **Michael Eisenberg**

Contact **Michael Eisenberg**
sales@playmagazine.com
Tel 818.707.7786 Ext 102
Fax 818.707.7212

Advertising Director **Greg Diaz**
gdiaz@playmagazine.com

play magazine online

Online Content Manager **Ashley Esqueda**
webmaster@playmagazine.com

Corporate

Director Of Operations **Julie Halverson**
jhalverson@playmagazine.com
818.707.7786 ext.104

VP of Sales & Marketing **Michael Eisenberg**
meisenberg@playmagazine.com

Administrative Assistant **Jennifer Ford**
jford@playmagazine.com

Subscriptions and Customer Service
(in U.S.) 800-694-6506
(outside U.S.) 818-487-2036
email: play@espcomp.com

play magazine Offices
Fusion Publishing, Inc.
29229 Canwood St., Suite 200
Agoura Hills, Ca 91301
Tel 818.707.7786 Fax 818.707.7212

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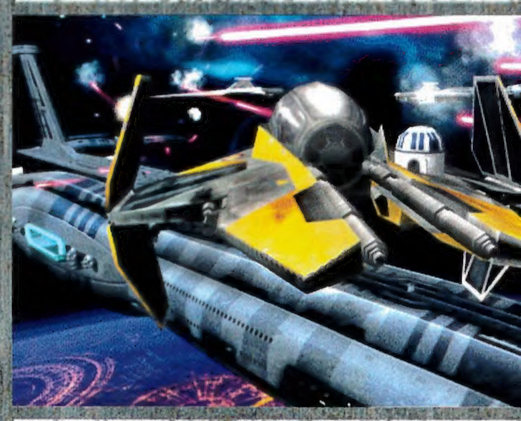

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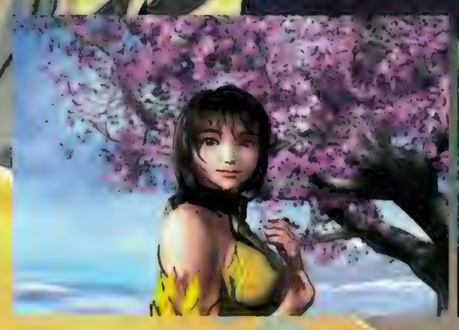

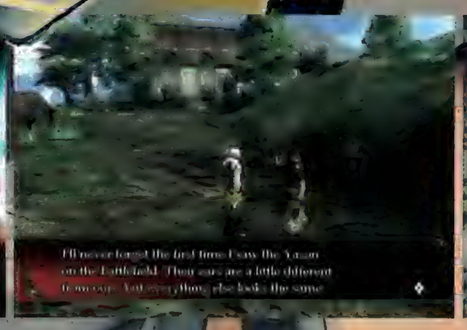

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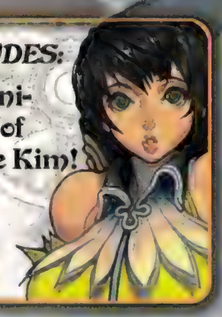

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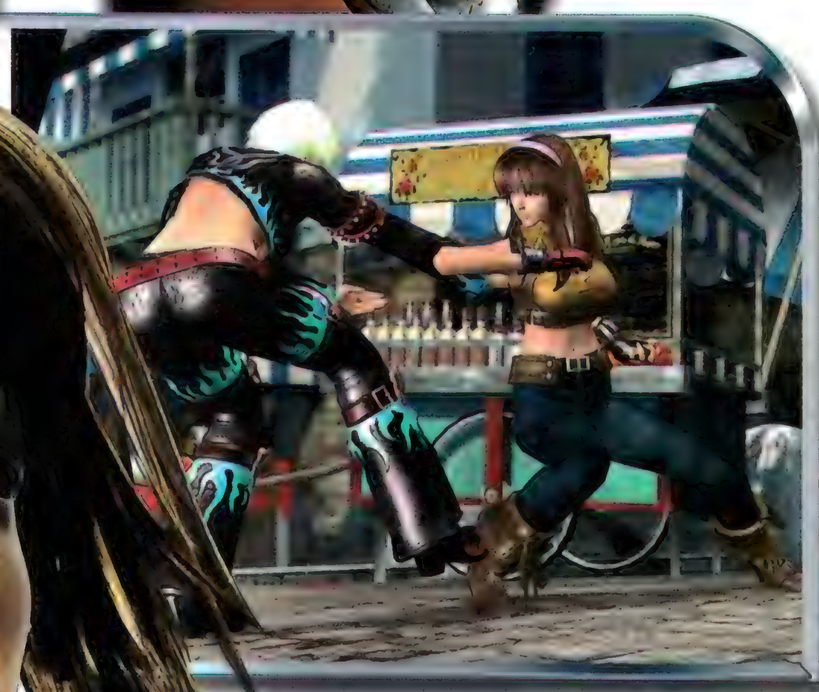

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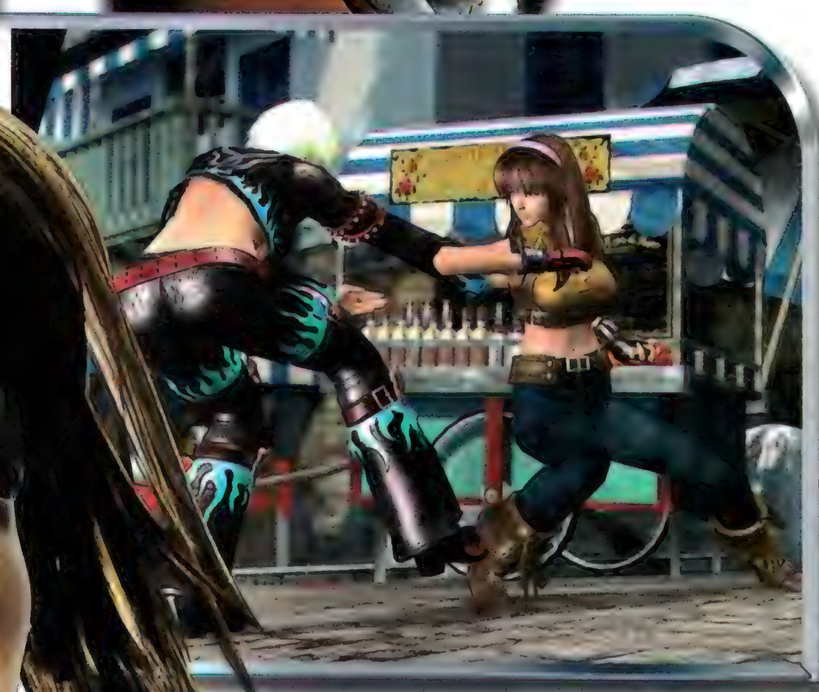

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REVOLUTIONARY

Or so we think...

Welcome to the Revolution, and welcome to wonderful controversy and curiosity. More polygon counts and special effects are one thing; how you command what you're seeing could truly be the new step we take with the next-generation hardware. At least, that's what Nintendo's banking on. Whatever you think of Nintendo's radical departure from conventional controller design, admit it: you're dying to have it in your hands more than anything before it. One part TV remote, one part magic wand, the streamlined device isn't as much of an evolution of the controller as a dramatic departure. Think of it as a virtual stylus: when pointed at the screen, the right hand remote senses motion, depth, positioning and targeting dictated by movement of the controller itself, while the left hand takes care of analog duties or other expansions. Conversations we've had within the industry vary from cynicism to wild excitement: will it tire you out? Does it alienate developers? Is it a reach too far into casual gaming? How will it affect the more traditional games? Are there more pieces to link the final product into something more? Time will tell where the controller takes us, if it's as cool as directing a symphony of images more akin to swimming through a virtual reality rather than tethered to a block in your lap, or just an awkward gimmick dreamed up by a company trying too hard to innovate for the sake of innovation.

"Conversations we've had within the industry vary from cynicism to wild excitement."

Adrian Carmack's A Series of Unfortunate Events

id, you've got some 'splaining to do...

The Wall Street Journal recently got their hands on a shocking bit of legal intelligence from 2004. The information, clearly never intended for public consumption, involves a bizarre legal melee between id Software co-founder Adnan Carmack, id, and id's longtime publishing partner, Activision. First off, it looks like Carmack (no relation to id's tech guru, John Carmack) is completely cast off from id. Up to now, PR has been finessing his absence as a well-earned retiring, but it's apparent that Adrian's departure transpired amid a storm of acrimony.

As per the WSJ report, Carmack's split with the House of Doom involved a mutiny of sorts. The accounting of events has id's four other co-owners banding together to unceremoniously boot Carmack's ass out of the fold, following his refusal of a $20 million buyout offer. This is where the ordeal continues to make noise, with Carmack fighting a contract mandate that would have him forcibly selling back his considerable storehouse of shares (41% ownership) for a bargain price of $11 million. The intrigue doesn't end there.

Also revealed in the report is Activision's takeover bid of $105 million made last year—not the first large offer summarily refused by id. Adrian Carmack's side of the story contends that fellow id co-owners closed the door on every Activision buyout offer in a deliberate ploy to fire him, so that, based on his contract, Carmack's shares could be re-acquired at a fraction of the cost that Activision would have shelled out for them. Carmack's final months at id were allegedly spent in a shadow of deprivation, his privileges and involvement curbed and censored as never before. No word on whether he was in favor of Activision's takeover offers, but if you've been connecting the dots up to this point...that may in fact be the case.

Yes folks, a lot of cash is at stake in this industry and money makes humans do strange things. We'd like to think that the bottom line is good gameplay, but millions of dollars are changing hands and buttons are being pushed for a different level of control.

Celebrity Gaming News

Jessica Alba

Self-proclaimed gamer Jessica Alba's getting into gamemaking? Apparantly, yeah, and she wants it to be sweet and nonviolent, uniting people on their cell phones in positive ways. It's based on some sort of progressive sport, and the young actress will be featured as a character.

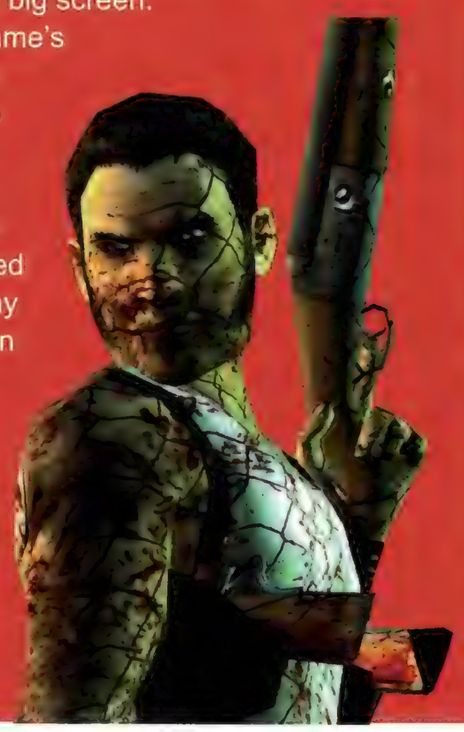
Adam Sandler

Guaranteed to be better than Resident Evil Apocalypse before even going into production, Grandma's Boy isn't actually a movie based on a video game, but a comedy about a 36-year-old game tester who's evicted from his apartment and forced to shack up with grandma and her two geriatric friends. So a movie plotted around gamers and their wacky exploits? Well, who better than Adam Sandler to pull it off... or at least his production company. Check out Adamsandler.com for the details.

The Suffering

MTV Films gives Torque the greenlight

The tortured Torque's making his film debut. MTV Films recently announced the option to take Midway's The Suffering (see review of Ties That Bind, pg. 89) to the big screen. Developed by Surreal Software, the game's adult themes and disturbing depictions of horror are joined by an emphasis on a detailed narrative, following Torque's imprisonment for the murder of his family and subsequent escape into the slums of Baltimore. "We are very excited to be working hand in hand with Midway to translate this innovative game into an edge-of-your-seat film," said David Gale, Executive Vice President, MTV Films. "Gaming is such a huge part of the culture for MTV's audience it makes perfect sense for us to work with Midway, Stan Winston and Circle of Confusion on bringing The Suffering to life as a feature film."



SEGA OPENS CG STUDIO

Gearing up for next-gen

With the next-generation of systems around the corner, the remarkably sophisticated technology will require new modes of development. Outsourcing and effects studios will certainly begin playing more important roles. In an effort to accommodate such forthcoming demands, SEGA has announced the opening of a CG studio in April of 2006, which will be devoted entirely to assets for games and other forms of entertainment. "With the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 expanding the possibilities of how well we can express art on screen, CG will become an even greater element of the gaming experience," said Sega. While in-game cinematics will be part of the focus, actual game assets are planned to come down the pipeline as well. The face of development is on the brink of some interesting new changes...

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The Wall Street Journal recently got their hands on a shocking bit of legal intelligence from 2004. The information, clearly never intended for public consumption, involves a bizarre legal melee between id Software co-founder Adnan Carmack, id, and id's longtime publishing partner, Activision. First off, it looks like Carmack (no relation to id's tech guru, John Carmack) is completely cast off from id. Up to now, PR has been finessing his absence as a well-earned retiring, but it's apparent that Adrian's departure transpired amid a storm of acrimony.

As per the WSJ report, Carmack's split with the House of Doom involved a mutiny of sorts. The accounting of events has id's four other co-owners banding together to unceremoniously boot Carmack's ass out of the fold, following his refusal of a $20 million buyout offer. This is where the ordeal continues to make noise, with Carmack fighting a contract mandate that would have him forcibly selling back his considerable storehouse of shares (41% ownership) for a bargain price of $11 million. The intrigue doesn't end there.

Also revealed in the report is Activision's takeover bid of $105 million made last year—not the first large offer summarily refused by id. Adrian Carmack's side of the story contends that fellow id co-owners closed the door on every Activision buyout offer in a deliberate ploy to fire him, so that, based on his contract, Carmack's shares could be re-acquired at a fraction of the cost that Activision would have shelled out for them. Carmack's final months at id were allegedly spent in a shadow of deprivation, his privileges and involvement curbed and censored as never before. No word on whether he was in favor of Activision's takeover offers, but if you've been connecting the dots up to this point...that may in fact be the case.

Yes folks, a lot of cash is at stake in this industry and money makes humans do strange things. We'd like to think that the bottom line is good gameplay, but millions of dollars are changing hands and buttons are being pushed for a different level of control.

Celebrity Gaming News

Jessica Alba

Self-proclaimed gamer Jessica Alba's getting into gamemaking? Apparantly, yeah, and she wants it to be sweet and nonviolent, uniting people on their cell phones in positive ways. It's based on some sort of progressive sport, and the young actress will be featured as a character.

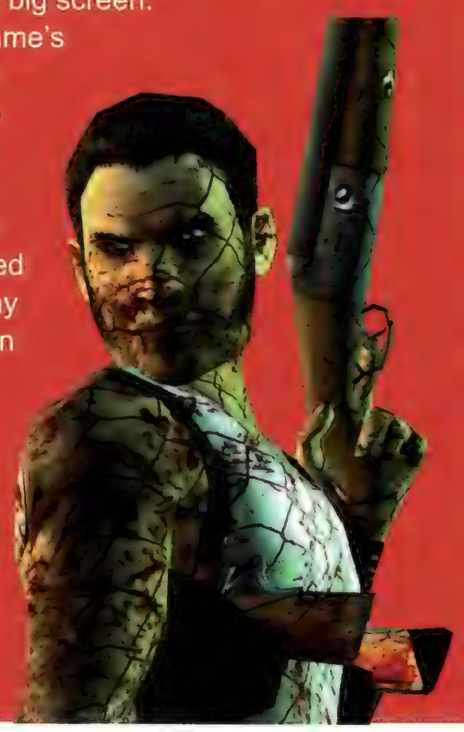
Adam Sandler

Guaranteed to be better than Resident Evil Apocalypse before even going into production, Grandma's Boy isn't actually a movie based on a video game, but a comedy about a 36-year-old game tester who's evicted from his apartment and forced to shack up with grandma and her two geriatric friends. So a movie plotted around gamers and their wacky exploits? Well, who better than Adam Sandler to pull it off... or at least his production company. Check out Adamsandler.com for the details.

The Suffering

MTV Films gives Torque the greenlight

The tortured Torque's making his film debut. MTV Films recently announced the option to take Midway's The Suffering (see review of Ties That Bind, pg. 89) to the big screen. Developed by Surreal Software, the game's adult themes and disturbing depictions of horror are joined by an emphasis on a detailed narrative, following Torque's imprisonment for the murder of his family and subsequent escape into the slums of Baltimore. "We are very excited to be working hand in hand with Midway to translate this innovative game into an edge-of-your-seat film," said David Gale, Executive Vice President, MTV Films. "Gaming is such a huge part of the culture for MTV's audience it makes perfect sense for us to work with Midway, Stan Winston and Circle of Confusion on bringing The Suffering to life as a feature film."



SEGA OPENS CG STUDIO

Gearing up for next-gen

With the next-generation of systems around the corner, the remarkably sophisticated technology will require new modes of development. Outsourcing and effects studios will certainly begin playing more important roles. In an effort to accommodate such forthcoming demands, SEGA has announced the opening of a CG studio in April of 2006, which will be devoted entirely to assets for games and other forms of entertainment. "With the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 expanding the possibilities of how well we can express art on screen, CG will become an even greater element of the gaming experience," said Sega. While in-game cinematics will be part of the focus, actual game assets are planned to come down the pipeline as well. The face of development is on the brink of some interesting new changes...

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03	**The Warriors** rockstar / ps2, xb
04	**Star Wars Battlefront II** lucasarts / xb, pc
05	**Fifa Soccer 06** ea sports / ps2, xb, x360, gc, pc
06	**From Russia With Love** electronic arts / ps2, xb, gc
07	**The Matrix: Path of Neo** atari / ps2, xb, pc
08	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / ps2, gc
09	**GTA: Liberty City Stories** rockstar / psp
10	**Marc Ecko's Getting Up** atari / ps2, xb, pc

NPD/TRSTS Top Ten Aug Game Sales

01	**Madden NFL 06** electronic arts / ps2
02	**Madden NFL 06** electronic arts / xb
03	**NCAA Football 06** electronic arts / ps2
04	**Clancy's Recon 2: Summit Strike** ubisoft / xb
05	**Nintendogs: Dachshund & Friends** nintendo / ds
06	**Pokemon Emerald** nintendo / gba
07	**Madden NFL 06** electronic arts / gc
08	**Star Wars Battlefront** lucasarts / ps2
09	**Nintendogs: Labrador & Friends** nintendo / ds
10	**Halo 2 Map Pack** microsoft / xb

Your Megastore Beckons!

The Matrix: Path of Neo
atari / ps2, xb, pc

If you've ever wanted to be Neo in those super-sweet action sequences throughout the Matrix trilogy, take the red pill.

The Warriors
rockstar / ps2, xb

It's a rumble in the Bronx like you've never seen. Command your posse and navigate them through the streets of NYC... Can you dig it?

Star Wars Battlefront 2 III
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Wonder what the Clone soldiers were thinking while the Emperor plotted to dispatch the Jedi Order? They tell the story through their eyes.

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02	**Kameo: Elements of Power** microsoft / x360
03	**Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** nintendo / gc
04	**Half-Life 2** electronic arts / xb
05	**Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow** konami / ds

Dave Halverson editor in chief

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03	**Castlevania: Curse of Darkness** konami / xb
04	**Gunstar Super Heroes** sega / ds
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Brady Fiechter executive editor

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05	**Ratchet: Deadlocked** sony / ps2

Ashley Esqueda senior editor

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04	**We Love Katamari** namco / ps2
05	**Conker: Live and Reloaded** microsoft / xb

Michael Hobbs art director

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05	**Mario Tennis: Power Tour** nintendo / ds

Greg Orlando associate editor

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02	**The Warriors** rockstar / xb
03	**Playboy: The Mansion** arush ent & groove games / xb
04	**Advance Wars: Dual Strike** intelligent systems / ds
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DRAGON QUEST V

Journey of the Cursed King

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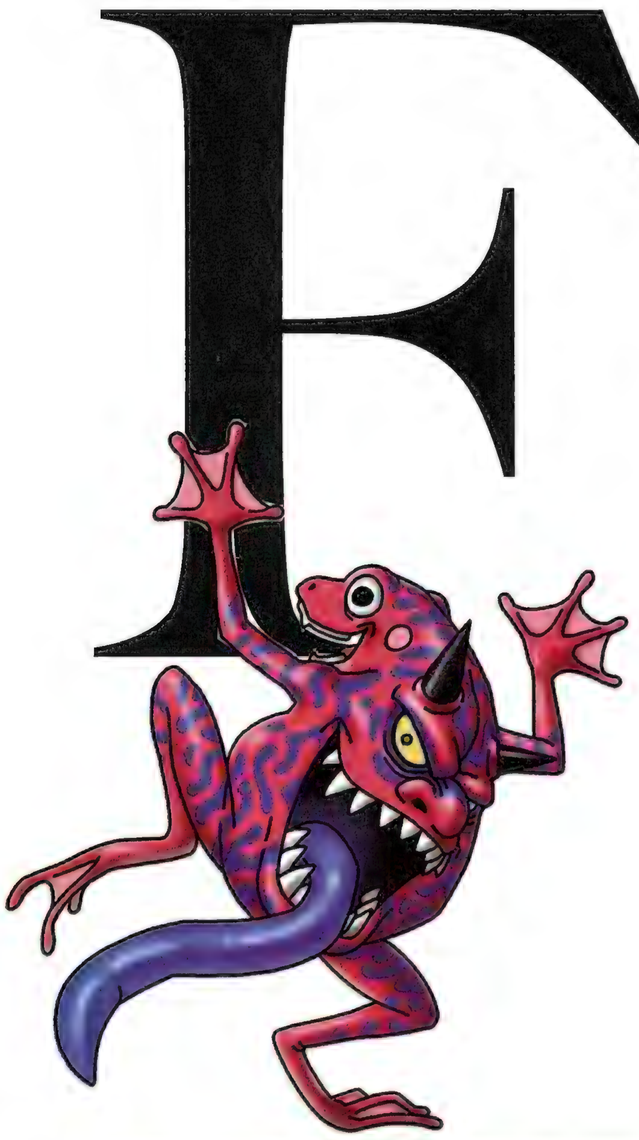


Few pairings in the history of modern pop-culture have created such a National stir as when Enix' Yuji Hori got together with Dragon Ball Z manga artist Akira Toriyama and birthed the Dragon Quest RPG series on Famicom. Dragon Quest (previously known as Dragon Warrior in North America) is so popular in Japan that following the release of Dragon Quest III in 1988, a law was passed forbidding the release of new installments on any day other than a Sunday or a holiday to prevent children from ditching school to wait in line for the latest installment in the series. Spreading far beyond the confines of the home-gaming console, DQ has spawned live ballets, musical concerts, music CDs and albums featuring selections performed by the world-famous London Philharmonic Orchestra. It's a gaming phenomenon in Japan with no equal.

But things haven't gone nearly as smoothly here in the US, where the series has enjoyed moderate success in the wake of Final Fantasy, the reigning king of RPGs in the West. How ironic that they now find themselves under the same umbrella; never say never in the game business. We used to joke about playing Sonic on Nintendo or Final Fantasy on any platform outside the Nintendo Empire, as if the end of the world were more likely…yet here we are. But DQ's lukewarm reception in the states is brimful of extenuating circumstances: The first four Dragon Warrior titles (the series is steeped in religious overtones, its most seductive charm) suffered extensive censorship in accordance with Nintendo's restrictions on religious iconography. Even the box fronts were altered, replacing coffins with ghosts, crucifixes with stars and priests with healers; part of the great packaging calamity of the '80s and '90s that we still see remnants of today, when American publishers butcher fine Japanese art with clumsy Western airbrushing. Due to Enix's closure, DQ V and VI were never even officially released here, and so, the series has had its share of strife with US audiences. All things considered however, for a series that has never pushed the graphics envelope and features a garlic-shaped blue slime for a mascot, it's not too shabby. When Dragon Quest VII was finally released for the Japanese PlayStation in 2000 (it was originally planned for Super Famicom and then N64 back in 1997 to give you a sense of the delay) it became the best selling Japanese PlayStation game of all time, but it still didn't hit nearly as big in 2001 when it came to America, making it ever apparent that to break through in the West it would take more than a grand lineage and brilliant story telling to hit critical mass; it was time to up the graphics ante…but who to take on such a daunting task?

Chosen to do the DQ extreme makeover, Level-5 (Dark Cloud 2, the unjustly cancelled True Fantasy Live) have quite utterly shocked me to the very

"What Level-5 has done, basically, is taken the traditional turn-based RPG and made it live."

The battles in DQ8 take on a life of their own.

> "I have to put it on par with the first time I saw Alucard or experienced the sunken ship level in Super Mario 64."

core of my being. Admittedly, I am one of those hardcore RPG fans that never embraced Dragon Quest—not so much for the censorship, but more because Final Fantasy (and later Phantasy Star, Vermillion, Lunar, etc.) looked so much better. Well, that and my apathy with declaring war on blue gum drops; I'm extremely relieved that slimes don't appear nearly as much in DQ8 as they have in previous installments. So captivated was I within my first few hours with Dragon Quest 8 that I immediately unwrapped (I know, pathetic) and began playing Dragon Warrior VII on the side. If I didn't know what Dragon Quest was, the experience would qualify as a grand epiphany (as it will for so many unaware of the series), but aware of its grand lineage (Toriyama is an icon) and endemic characteristics I have to put it on par with the first time I saw Alucard or experienced the sunken ship level in Super Mario 64. DQ8 is now my favorite turn-based RPG of all time.

What Level-5 has done, basically, is taken the traditional turn-based RPG and made it live. I cannot tell you how done I was moving my icon over crude world maps or simply warping to locations, let alone the frustration of overly elaborate battles mired in pomp before the fighting even began. In Dragon Quest 8 everything is as it should be. Towns, villages, keeps and abbeys are real-time, painstakingly crafted and bustling with interesting people with a sense of purpose amidst a level of detail beyond measure: ivy spread out across walls and steps on separate layers, water that looks and reacts in accord with the surroundings, animation for the most rudimentary acts like opening doors or running, small pads of grass that envelop your feet, puffs of dirt and matching terrain as you walk or run, and most notably facial expressions that reflect mood to such a degree that it actually affects the dialogue. I can't tell you how refreshing it is to have an in-game conversation where the characters' mannerisms work in harmony with the dialogue rather than the usual analogous animation loop that turns most

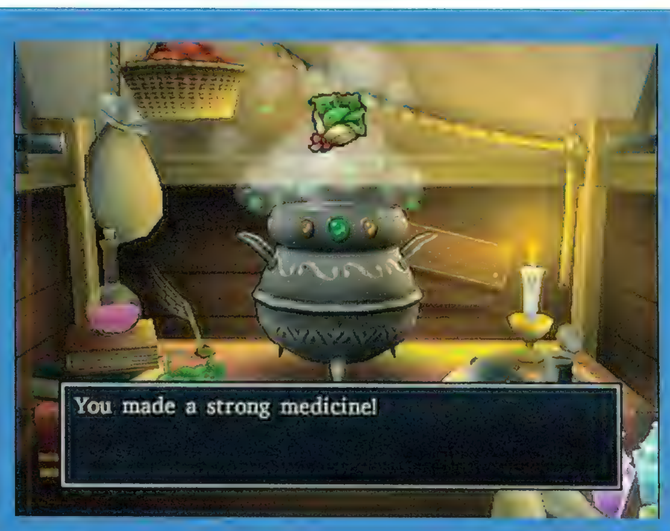
These meticulously sculpted and detailed figures are currently available only in Japan although chances are they'll be making there way Stateside soon after the game, or at least one would certainly hope so.

characters into brainless marionettes. Take a good look at the wardrobe too. Cloaks and worn accessories never fold into or melt through each other. It's an absolute masterwork. Living art is the only way to describe it.

Venturing out, if your destination is two miles away then you better get moving down the path…or not. If you can see an opening over the horizon, cut across the mountains and take your chances off the beaten path. There are always chests or rogue enemies waiting in the countryside for the bold adventurer. One moment in particular that made me stop and take heed was coming over the bluff between Alexandria and Port Prospect as the ocean comes into view a half-mile or so down the mountain; the tide visibly rolling in even from so far away. What's even better is that you can run down across the rocks onto the shore and level up fighting Yabbies and other assorted sea vermin in the surf. The freedom and sense of the world in DQ8 is uncanny—its panoramas by far the best I've ever seen. The battles themselves are quick to load and because the enemies are so alive, extraordinary, and reactive, every skirmish is a joy. Boss battles (and they are a wily bunch) require you to be at the ready, and should you die send you back to church for resurrection with half the coin, so be warned. It's a long trek back but once you get used to the flow of the game you'll learn to manage your resources with the utmost proficiency. Outside and in dungeons things are as lively as you can imagine. Dancing devils cause affected party members to break into rhythmic dance (I know it sounds corny but just wait 'til you see it), diminutive attackers wielding massive hammers too big for their size might topple over trying to reach you, and as the game progresses the sheer number of indigenous creatures is as daunting as it is utterly captivating. And not only do the enemies animate better than anything you've ever seen but they cast and reflect light and all have realistic death animations, rather than just disappear. Invention and attention to detail is alive and well in Dragon Quest 8. There's also a spell to avoid annoying attacks from weaker enemies when you're on the go, and they change from day to night which also happens in real time in the game. Enter a town or village at night and don't expect to stock up on supplies; everyone is asleep. Better to roam around and level up outside of town until you see the sun come up. Ah, what a lovely game this is. Unlike the Japanese version (which sold 3-million copies in one week) the US DQ8 also has a deep menu system where you can manage Items, Magic, and Attributes (on top of having actual speech, but more on that later). Success in battle is as, if not more, dependent on wielding the proper weapon and requisite skills than merely leveling up (although it too factors in) so you must keep a close eye on where you are and with whom you're frequenting in battle. Swords, Spears, Boomerangs, and Fisticuffs all have degrees of mastery and each weapon type has its place in the game. Simply maxing out a single skill for the duration is not recommended.

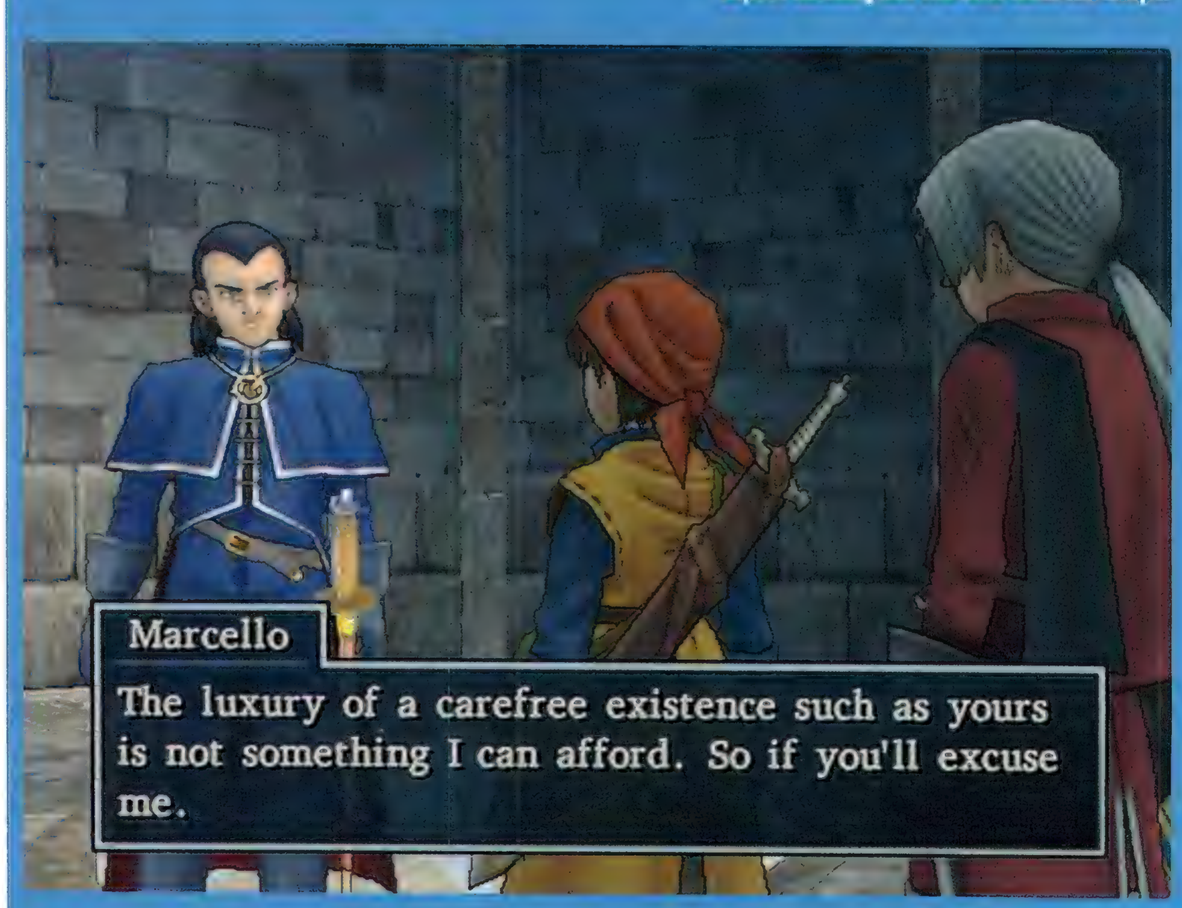
Alchemy: It's what's for dinner

The alchemy pot is one of the games more unique devices where by using found recipes or experimenting with found items you can concoct special items in the wagon as you traverse the countryside. *Bon appétit*!



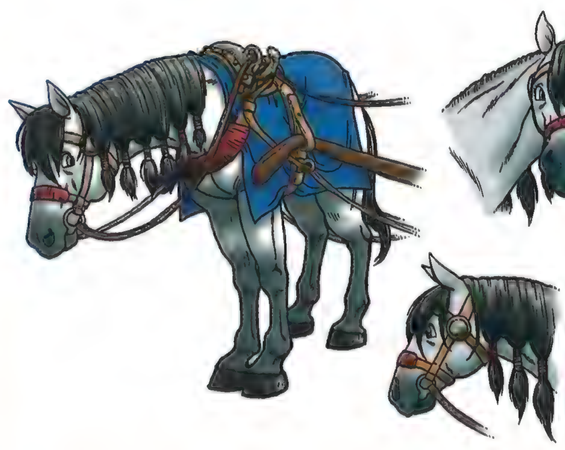
If slime controllers don't make it to American shores we're staging a protetst...right after we order a dozen from our favorite import mail order! There is simply no better way to fight slime than with slime.

Expect nothing but the best from the script.



Akira Toriyama

Born in Aichi in 1955. In 1978, Toriyama-san debuted as a manga artist in Weekly Shonen Jump. His name became famous with the success of *Dr. Slump* and *Dragon Ball*. The original Dragon Ball comic book series sold more than 120 million copies. With the worldwide success of *Dragon Ball*, Toriyama-san has become popular across a wide range of generations. Toriyama-san has been the character designer for the Dragon Quest series since the original title.



"The freedom and sense of the world in DQ8 is uncanny—its panoramas by far the best I've ever seen."

Not to be outdone in any way, shape or form, once your entire party is amassed you're given a ship and essentially left to your own non-linear devices. In an era where games essentially tell you how to proceed in fear that you'll get lost and run back to your retailer in a huff demanding a refund, Square Enix has actually decided to set you free. Not only does this greatly impact the flow of the game contingent on a host of variables, but it encourages the base principal of what role-playing games are supposed to be about: adventure…which leads to the most critical juncture of this review.

Speaking with series die-hards, they seem more concerned with the localization than anything else, which given the majesty of the visuals is certainly a testament to the series' story telling lineage. I suppose some setup is (finally) in order.

To all RPGs a villain must be born, and in this case he's a doozy…a jester by the name of Dhoulmagus, who I love for two reasons; he is a complete loon in the most likeable way (akin to Nicholson's Joker, say) and he's wonderfully creative. He seems to revel in his deviousness and I like that in an evildoer. Snatching a forbidden scepter long sealed away, he uses its power to place a curse on the kingdom, transforming the people to thorns…all but the King and Princess, whom he turns instead into a squalid green monster and horse, respectively. All but one escaped his fiendish horticulture…namely you, the unnamed player hired by his highness forthwith to track down the evil jester and reverse his cruel spell. Along the way… actually before the game gets underway (much of the setup is seen in flashback) the three pick up Yangus, a character whom I also loved the moment he opened his mouth and began spouting crude innuendo like a cross between Ozzy Osbourne and a drunken Bob Hoskins. Yes: Dragon Quest 8 is voiced by British actors. The setting for the Dragon Quest series has always been Medieval Europe and given that the English vernacular lends itself better to role-playing, the presentation is all the better for it. King Trodes, Yangus, and Jessica are probably the best vocalized characters in the history of American RPGs and the script on the whole easily topples any thing before it, due in no small part to the fact that the characters themselves actually deliver performances. And finally I must mention the score, which, while it does include series-endemic melodies, is full and rich to the extent that (I must sound like a broken record by now) it sounds too good to be in a video game. I know how pretentious that sounds, and I'd say the same about many a Final Fantasy or Castlevania, but Koichi Sugiyama has truly outdone himself.

There are only two things I'd like to have seen in DQ8 that didn't make it in, both of which are most certainly memory-related issues: Rather than have the party join as one on the world map it would have been nice to have them appear on the map together (that Jessica is mighty fine) and, given the detail, that the lead character is not dynamic to steps and slopes does take a bite out of the realism. Otherwise, and these don't even amount to a blip on the radar given the majesty of this game, Dragon Quest 8 is a perfect RPG. There is far more to discover than what I have managed to graze over here (such as monster breeding and side quests) amounting to a massive 60-70 hour long undertaking, but it is time very well spent, as you'll likely never forget your time with this amazing cast. The overall structure of the game is nothing new: You can still pop open chests in people's houses and search through their belongings to find useable items and such, but it wouldn't be Dragon Quest if you couldn't (it'd be Fable). DQ8 is the epitome and ultimate maturation of traditional role-playing, nothing more, nothing less.

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King — 10 Score

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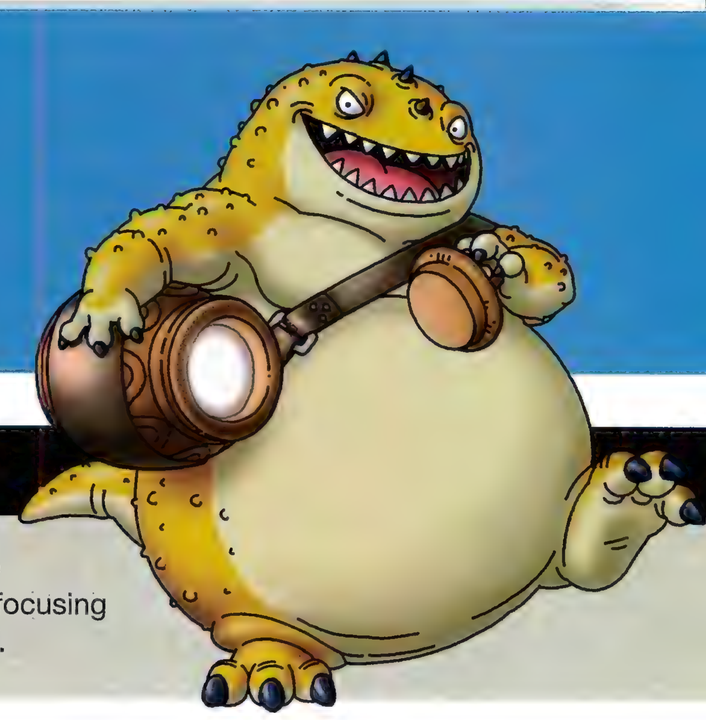
Everything

Nothing

Developer: Yuji Horii, Akira Toriyama, Koich Sugiyama, and Level-5 Inc. **Publisher:** Square Enix, Inc.
Online: None **Available:** November

INTERVIEW



Akihiro Hino

Founded in October 1998, Level-5 developed *Dark Cloud*, one of the first RPGs for the PlayStation 2. With more than 100 developers, Level-5 is working on a variety of titles focusing on the Fantasy RPG genre. Their upcoming title is the highly anticipated *Rogue Galaxy*.

play: Converting one of the most legendary RPGs in the world into 3D had to be a daunting task. How did Level-5 and Yuji Horii get together? We're happy he's found a developer with matching skills to make his vision a reality in 3D.
Akihiro Hino: Horii-san had a look at the prototype that Level-5 created for the newest installment of Dragon Quest, and agreed upon the direction of the game. I'm very proud that our prototype triggered Horii-san to conceive what is now *Dragon Quest VIII*.

Was his vision for DQ in 3D set in stone or were you able to help mold the vision for the transition to 3D?
The direction of the 3D conversion was already decided at the prototype stage. Horii-san was actively involved during the production with the camera work and control of the game up until completion. In the end, I feel that the finished product is something that both sides are satisfied with.

When did the project begin? Was there much planning to do or was much of the story and design fleshed out when you began the project?
The story was laid out before the development started, but it changed drastically after Level-5 joined the team. I believe something tickled Horii-san's creativity and he wanted to fix lots of different things.

What was the collaboration like? How closely have you worked together throughout the development?
I really enjoyed the collaboration. Producing a game alongside Horii-san was very educational, and the development team at Square Enix was full of extremely fun people. We created a very pleasant and comfortable relationship with each other, which continued throughout the development. We basically communicated closely through phone calls and e-mail, but Horii-san and Sugiyama-san did come out to Fukuoka for the adjustments of the core parts.

I ask because I am so in awe of the details in this game. And not just the graphical ones but the mannerisms and how the characters movements match the speech. It's as if you're watching a scripted film rather than the usual robotic loops we're used to. How difficult is this to achieve in- engine?
The polygon engine for *DQVIII* was significantly altered and rebuilt from the previous titles. From a programming perspective, it's practically a complete makeover. We fine-tuned many elements to better convey the world of DQ. Because of these adjustments, we take pride in saying that Toriyama-san's Dragon Quest art style has been expressed to the fullest in *DQVIII*. As for the rest, I feel that each staff members' personal tastes contributed the sense of comfort ubiquitous in the world of *DQVIII*.

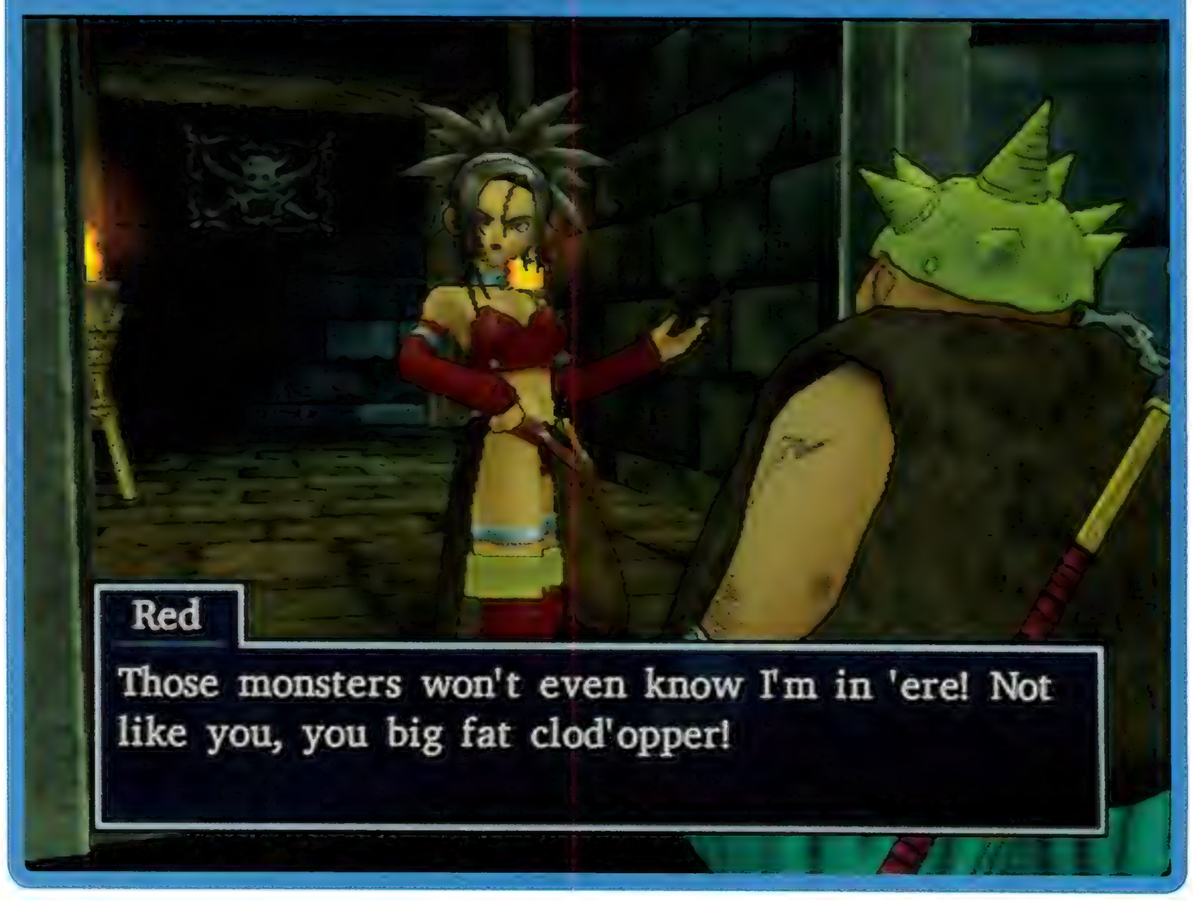
That same detail is evident in every corner of the game... puffs of dust or grass under foot, dynamic lighting... The ivy on the east tower is layered and leaks out onto the steps, and when you come over the bluff between Alexandria and Port prospect and see the ocean it is truly magical. Were moments such as this calculated or did they just happen that way?
We put a lot of attention to detail into the scenery development. For example, Horii-san had a vision for the scenery right outside of Farebury, (the first village in the game). In order to meet his desire, we had to adjust the area's layout. We also paid close attention to the scenery for areas when Horii-san gave us no particular instructions. The field layout in particular was completely changed and recreated when the production had less than six months remaining.

What does it take in terms of man hours to pull off this kind of detail? It's rarely achieved on this level but it makes all the difference...
The man-hours spent varied by scene. I can't go into details, but I recall the latter half getting completed at an enormous speed.

Another aspect of the design that caught my eye is how you manage to layer and animate clothing and accessories on your characters with no seep through. I don't think I've ever seen such clean characters. Is this something you consciously set out to achieve?
We didn't do anything different in particular. The only thing is maybe the polygon designer paid more attention in creating the polygon data so that there wouldn't be any clipping. That's about it.

I found myself doing quite a bit of leveling up outside of towns to purchase the best weapons and armor, mostly because you've given us such wonderful open environments to explore. Did you create them with this in mind? It would seem you're really encouraging exploration. I found more than a few surprises way off the beaten path...
In order to make exploring more fun, we placed treasure chests and roaming monsters on the field for the first time in Dragon Quest series history. These elements make the world outside not simply more enjoyable to look at, but to explore as well.

"I really enjoyed the collaboration. Producing a game alongside Horii-san was very educational..."



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XBOX

PlayStation®2

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GUN

Gettin' Wild in the West

It's a bloody shame the Wild West doesn't serve as the backdrop to more games. Guns, whores, gambling, senseless shootouts, and the spirited American history brought to virtual life; what's not to like? Neversoft agrees; that's why they've ditched Tony Hawk for Colton White, a rugged frontiersman out to find some gold, exact some revenge, and kill some peoples who need killing.

As for the killing part, Colton's good with shotguns, revolvers, rifles and the occasional stick of dynamite, which all shred the bad guys into bloody bits and pieces. The game carries a violent edge, and it's not playing off of a cartoon narrative and presentation in the slightest. When you see enemies crawling in agony, it's time to pull out the knife and finish with a clean scalping.

One of my favorite parts of the action is the quick-draw, which becomes widely useful early on in the game as you find yourself locked in a number of wild shootouts across neat set pieces like a moving ferry and heavily populated bar. The opposition will take hostages, flank, and duck for cover as you move through the flying bullets. When you feel it's necessary, the quick-draw slows down the action, draining your meter while you flick from target to target for a precise kill. It feels smooth and satisfying, a nice take on the familiar bullet-time effect.

GUN is very much a free-roaming, wide-open adventure, with a bevy of side quests and story branches that play out according to your leisure. I had a great time just sitting at the bar, playing Texas hold 'em for cash to buy supplies. Stock up on whisky; it's the game's healing juice you're gonna need plenty of.

As the opening tutorial gets you acclimated with the controls, setting up hunting sequences and target practice, you're introduced to your prized horse. Every western must have battles on steed, and here the cowboys and Indians wars have never been so densely portrayed. For a more serious, realistic take on the Wild West, GUN's off to claim new territory. Brady Fiechter

GUN

Preview

PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC, 360

Point of Interest

Neversoft president Joel Jewitt bought a pair of horses to get the team a feeling for the real thing

Developer: [illegible] **Publisher:** [illegible]

Online: [illegible] **Available:** [illegible]

"Guns, whores, gambling, senseless shoot-outs, and the spirited American history"

Ain't nothin' like old-fashioned cowboys 'n' indians...

Six into 360 goes magnificently...

Namco may have overdone things slightly with Ridge Racer 6. "There are planes flying everywhere," Ryota Toyama, the game's localization producer admits. They bank and soar across 6's skies and are, indeed, ever present.

This is what Namco can do with the Xbox 360. Helicopters hover over race courses. Glass skyscrapers can catch and reflect the sunlight and skid marks stay etched into roadways as a reminder of a perfect drift. Environmental objects can be done—and overdone—and animated to create a game world that moves and pulses in a way few of its console brethren have. But that's just eye candy to be littered among the backgrounds. What happens in the foreground is ultimately more impressive.

Racer runs at 60fps, and is populated by high-definition car models. Under normal circumstances, game developers create these spectacular cars and "compact" them to create the in-game models so as not to overtax a console's abilities. Not here, and certainly not on Xbox 360. This is a new generation of game consoles, a new opportunity for greatness, and Namco's gorgeously rendered vehicles go into the game unmolested.

Six marks the popular driving game's debut on Xbox. It will also appear online for the first time, with Xbox Live hosting head-to-races, leaderboards, and downloadable content such as new cars and tracks. Ghost car data can be uploaded and downloaded too, with players able to match their skills against the best drivers from across the world. The number of human racers has yet to be decided for Live challenges, but 6's associate product marketing manager Lin Leng suggests a maximum of eight would be a good bet.

Here, bigger is better. Thirty courses and 130 cars are included, making this edition of Racer the most content-heavy. In World Xplorer mode, a series of hexagonal boxes are laid out across the screen, each representing a different automotive test. If a player completes all the challenges that surround a box with a question mark in it, they're rewarded with some token of Namco's esteem, and the mode's challenges can be selected or disregarded at will, allowing for a fully customizable race tour. There's also the option to replace the game's cool, but techno- and electronic music-heavy score with customized soundtracks created from either MP3s or WMAs.

With 6 scheduled to launch in November with the Xbox 360, there seems to be little cause for concern. The game both looks and plays beautifully, with the "drifting equals nitrous oxide" mechanic firmly intact and operating smoothly. Sliding into turns to avoid banging into obstacles and navigate without breaking proves a great challenge, and a technique worthy of mastering. There's also a tangible sense of speed to be had, and if coverwoman Reiko Nagase's dazzling smile is any indication, 6's streets may well be paved with gold.

Greg Orlando

Ridge Racer 6

Xbox 360

Point of Interest

Namco's classic racing game series makes its Xbox debut as a 360 launch title.

Developer: Namco **Publisher:** Namco
Online: TBD **Available:** November 22

Elements of Power

I'm just going to come right out and say it—I've been a little worried about Rare for a while. Sure, we were blessed on the N64 with consecutive million sellers, but current gen has been pretty sparse. If you haven't been counting, we've seen three titles from Rare this generation: Star Fox Adventures for GameCube, Grabbed by the Ghoulies for Xbox, and Conker: Live and Reloaded. Now, Conker will always have a glittering little black place in my heart, but it was still a remake with added multiplayer; Star Fox was really fun but lacked that intangible magic for me; and Grabbed by the Ghoulies was hilarious, but wasn't exactly a homerun. I longed for that signature brilliance from the masterminds that brought us games like Banjo-Kazooie and Goldeneye. It's developers like them, after all, that continue to raise the bar for fun, enchanting titles—complex yet brilliantly executed. So like I said, I was worried for a little while... until I laid eyes on a pair of launch titles that seem to signal the beginning of their next era of majesty.

All the elements of a superb Rare adventure

save the day. The landscape (in every area I was privy to see) is incredible; blades of grass sway in the wind, water is dynamic and laps up onto the water's edge, and Kameo walks with a lithe but determined step. Rare's included their penchant for collectibles through elemental fruits— but for those not inclined to search high and low through every level looking for them (something Rare admitted as a task casual gamers didn't quite like), you can opt to buy them with Runes instead. The biggest shock comes by way of the main hub (the now all-too-familiar field of trolls)... Since E3 they've added even more, if you can imagine that. Graphically, Kameo pushes the envelope beyond almost everything before it. Rare's use of parallax mapping gives every crack and crevice real depth for an overall stunning effect. When you morph into Major Ruin (the rock armadillo warrior), you really get the sense he's made of stone as if you could reach into the television and grab him. Heat shimmers when fire gets close, or if it's a particularly hot day you'll notice the heat beating down on you, warping your line of sight slightly while you traverse the world, collecting Warriors to morph into for the game's sea of indigenous devices. Rare's especially happy that they were able to make use of the Xbox 360's power to actually show Kameo's ghost-like figure residing within each element of power (something they couldn't accomplish on the Xbox), which keeps you connected to her even though you're controlling one of the elements.

Kameo's morphing is in real-time, allowing for some interesting puzzle-solving and some pretty tricky moments during the first part of the game. Oftentimes you'll be required to change forms in mid-action, making this the first "morph" game I've played that allows you to utilize all of the given powers at your own discretion; each one of them proves useful in solving different puzzles, sometimes even needing to morph in mid-air between warriors to progress. There are two warriors assigned to each element (fire, water, earth, ice, and flora) and they each have unique fighting styles and special moves (they all control differently, and can be upgraded with the aforementioned elemental fruits) Kameo will be able to buy or unlock, depending on your preference. All of the Elements play a key role in solving puzzles, journeying, and confronting the game's epic bosses, just like those Rare games of old, only on a much grander scale. You might develop a favorite to walk around as (I quite enjoyed Pummel Weed, a thorny, boxing plant that can root himself underground and uppercut an enemy hiding under an object) but you can switch to any earned Element on the fly. He has that same smarmy (and slightly maniacal) grin that you'd see on the face of an evil plant in Nightmare Before Christmas, and he's just so fun to beat up on baddies with!

Players that are totally in the zone when battling enemies have the opportunity to go into Focus Mode, wherein an aurora glows on the outer edge of the screen, time slows down, and your character continues to move at regular speed, allowing for huge combos and high point scores in an

They're hiding in there...which element is best suited to take them out?

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The environments only get more and more incredible as you progress.

area. Those point scores will be registered on Xbox 360's Live program, adding lots of replayability for those desiring an über-high score. In addition, for people that haven't really been exposed to video games too much but decide to take a shot at Kameo, there's Ortho, a wise old man come to life in book form. He'll advise you if there's a particular area you're stuck on, beginning with a small hint. From there the game will calculate how long you've been running around in an area and what actions you've performed so that Ortho can dish out hints accordingly, depending on how clueless he thinks you are. For hardcore fans, fear not as you'll be able to shut off help completely, but for the kids and casual gamers, this is a nice little backup life preserver that will ensure no one gets left behind.

Kameo herself is a beauty; she's light as a fairy (maybe because she is one) and controls accordingly. Her warriors also control according to the surroundings and type of beast you've morphed into. Deep Blue (a water warrior) controls so nicely underwater: He makes flowing turns, and when you're beneath the surface, he truly feels as if you're controlling something in water. All of the other warriors retain a unique feel, and it's a breath of fresh air knowing that Rare has given us a veritable smorgasbord of 11 warriors to choose from (10 warriors plus Kameo herself) that all feel distinctive in their control and movement.

Playing Kameo was one of the more joyful experiences I've had this year, and I'm going to call it early and say that she's going to sweep a lot of categories come award season. She's everything we've ever wanted in a game, and I simply cannot wait to play the entire game and experience her world. The voiceover is spot on (Rare's using professional voice talent for the first time), and the story is enchanting, something that will keep gamers glued to their new 360s with a smile on their face and a song in their heart. I'm all for the resurrection of the platformer as the king of console genres…but if Kameo's making them the queen, that's a-ok by me.

Ashley Esqueda

Kameo: Elements of Power

Preview

Xbox 360

Point of Interest

Kameo has jumped three consoles; it was first slated for release on the GameCube, then the Xbox, and will finally find its home on the Xbox360.

Developer: Rare **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
Online: TBD **Available:** November 22, 2005

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PERFECT DARK ZERO

Joanna's ready for her 360 closeup...and what a closeup it is

When Rare unleashed Perfect Dark for the Nintendo 64 back in 2000, few expected it to be better than GoldenEye, but it succeeded. Joanna Dark's work with the Carradine Institute in the slickly futuristic year of 2023 took us on a journey that many of us won't soon forget. Joanna was deadly, sexy, and embodied a true female heroine; she didn't take crap from anyone, but still retained a feminine aura that gave her an irresistible allure. She'll go down in history next to the likes of Samus Aran, another strong yet sexy leading lady (and both bounty hunters to boot). Perfect Dark Zero plans to show us how Joanna Dark came to be the Renaissance woman we met in the original installment.

The year is 2020. It's three years before the events occurring in the first Perfect Dark and the Joanna Dark we know and love doesn't exist yet; in fact, a 20-year-old Joanna is about to begin her training

Look at that heat shimmer, baby!

to become a bounty hunter, shadowing her father Jack Dark and preparing to work alongside him for their bail bonds company. She's grown up a remarkable gymnast, and participates in a sport named HoloDeathmatch (sponsored by none other than dataDyne, the corporation she fought against in the first PD), but her father has always kept her from the family business until now. The single-player story of PDZ will trek from her first mission as a fledgling bounty hunter to her eventual recruitment by the Carradine Institute, culminating in her agent status we're familiar with in the initial PD.

Rare's brought Joanna to the Xbox 360 in stunning fashion. Since she's three years younger (and nowhere near as collected as she was in the original), she's taken on a sort of reverse transformation. No longer do we see a professional agent of the Carradine Institute, we see a hip, sexy young lady with red hair and blonde highlights, tattoos and the like. She's a little rough around the edges metaphorically, but certainly not visually; the 360's power has given her curves in places I didn't even know existed. Graphically the 360 is a behemoth, and the addition of Rare's parallax mapping makes for a gorgeous game that's definitely getting filed under the heading "eye candy." I only wish I had seen Joanna more during my hands-on time. Since PDZ is a first-person shooter, you don't get many glances at Joanna's beauty (and her feet seem to be missing when she looks down), but the moments you do get are pretty— well, *pretty*.

Missions in PDZ have taken an interesting turn, similar to the first PD in that you'll be given different objectives depending on the three difficulty settings, but different in that you'll also be able to take alternate routes through a level within those difficulty settings. There are three main gadgets Joanna will be able to take with her on missions (usually you can only take one), and that will often determine what route you'll be able to take on a mission. There's a demo kit (for blasting your way through walls), a data thief (which allows Joanna to hack into and open doors), and an interesting little knickknack called the "locktopus" (a lockpick device). Weapons will be managed by choosing what to carry before a mission begins, and you'll only have four slots for your weaponry. Pistols might only take up one slot, but something like a rocket launcher's gonna take up three spaces, so it's up to a player to decide how they're going to attack any given mission. Take a sniper rifle and you'll need to rely heavily on stealth since the rifle takes up three slots. Take a pair of Uzis and things might get messy…

> "Perfect Dark Zero plans to show us how Joanna Dark came to be the Renaissance woman we met in the original installment."

One of the most exciting additions to this Perfect Dark is a cooperative mode that's truly cooperative. You know how aggravating it is to spawn next to your teammate because they just walked through a checkpoint, but you didn't want to come with them? Well, wave goodbye to that, because in PDZ, the entire level loads before you begin, allowing for you and your teammate to complete your own

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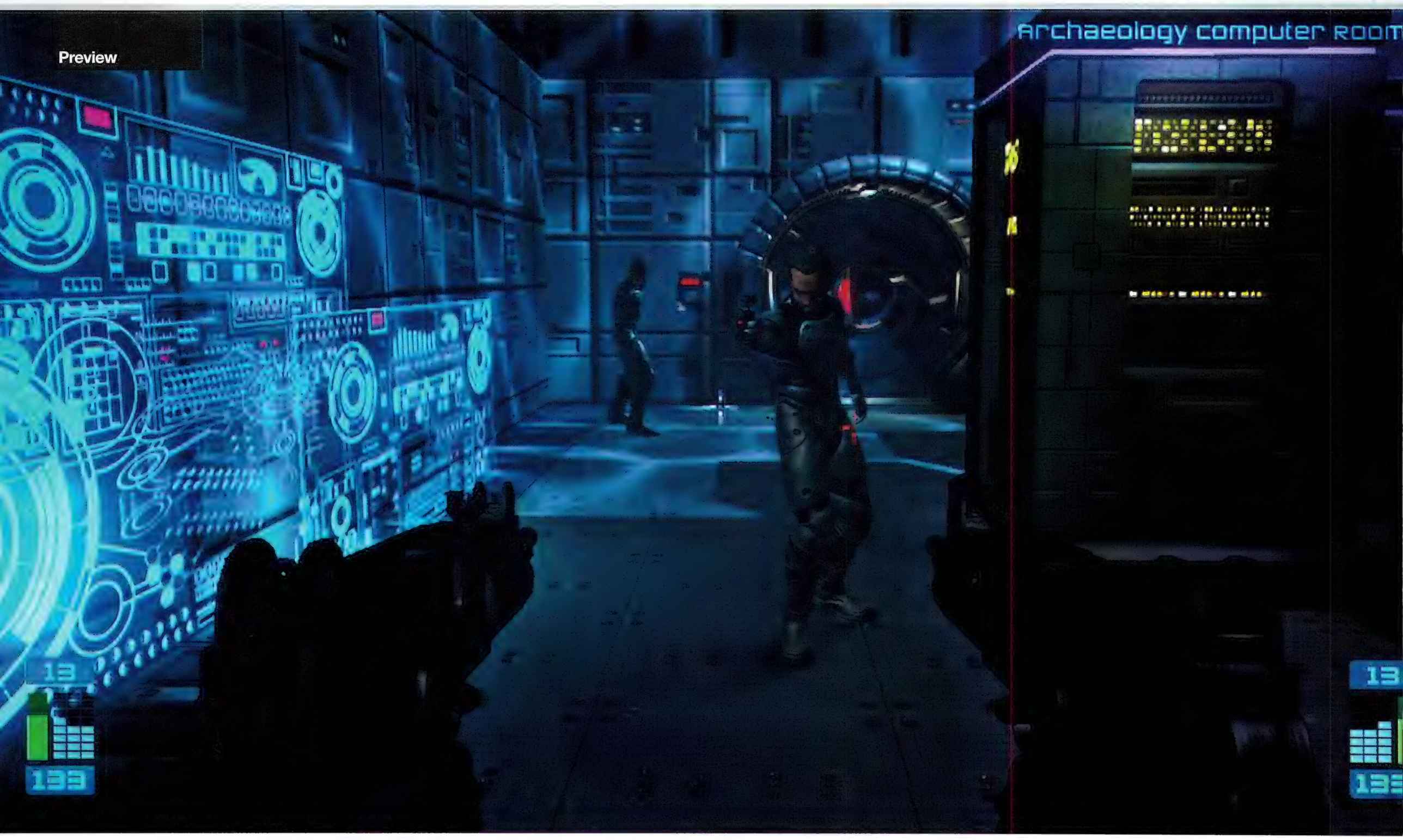
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warehouse office

JOANNA DARK
Not exactly the hardened agent we saw in the first Perfect Dark...

individual objectives in order to progress yourself and your buddy through the main mission. You'll be able to explore, get lost, and never feel like you're sewed at the hip to your partner, but you'll need to help each other in a leapfrog fashion in order to complete a mission. One player will play as Joanna while the other will control Jack, and you'll constantly be working together to progress through a level. A score will be doled out upon a level's completion (whether in single or co-op mode), and will tack itself to your Xbox Live account… but fear not, if you blew it the first 10 tries, you'll be able to replay that mission as many times as you wish to boost your score and save face with your online pals.

Speaking of your friends, PDZ's multiplayer is also putting a fresh face on the mode, offering level editors on par with the likes of Halo and Counter-Strike (and in some ways better). There will be an option for allowing a player into a game mid-match or locking them out until the next round begins (something Halo 2 fans will be happy about) and the six different multiplayer maps will be expandable or contractable, depending on how a group wants to face off. Want a small, fast-paced map with rocket launchers only? Done. A huge map with two safe bases, vehicles and sweet sniper locales? Check. Also, Rare looks to up the Xbox Live ante by offering two modes of multiplayer combat: a Counter-Strike-like Special Ops mode where players will only have one life per round and must buy their weaponry before the round begins; and a fully-realized Deathmatch mode with unlimited spawns (as in most FPS Deathmatches). Rare's definitely looking to change the face of online multiplayer, both figuratively and literally; the best player on a multiplayer team will have a special skin bestowed upon them (Joanna Dark is one of these special models, as is Jack Dark). This works as both a blessing and a curse, so if you're the best on a team, everyone will know it…but you can bet your enemies will want to take you out the most. Rare mentioned the possibility of downloadable content like new skins and maps in the future, but there wasn't anything concrete, so players will have to enjoy the six maps that come with the initial launch.

The time I spent with the lovely Joanna may have been brief, but it was a shining example of Rare's ability to take a video game character and blast them into another stratosphere. Joanna is her own star; she doesn't need a famous voice to go with her face (even though this is Rare's first foray into professional voiceover for their characters). She *is* Joanna Dark, not someone playing Joanna Dark, and that's going to be one of many small touches that make PDZ an FPS that's a step above the rest. Ashley Esqueda

Perfect Dark Zero — Preview

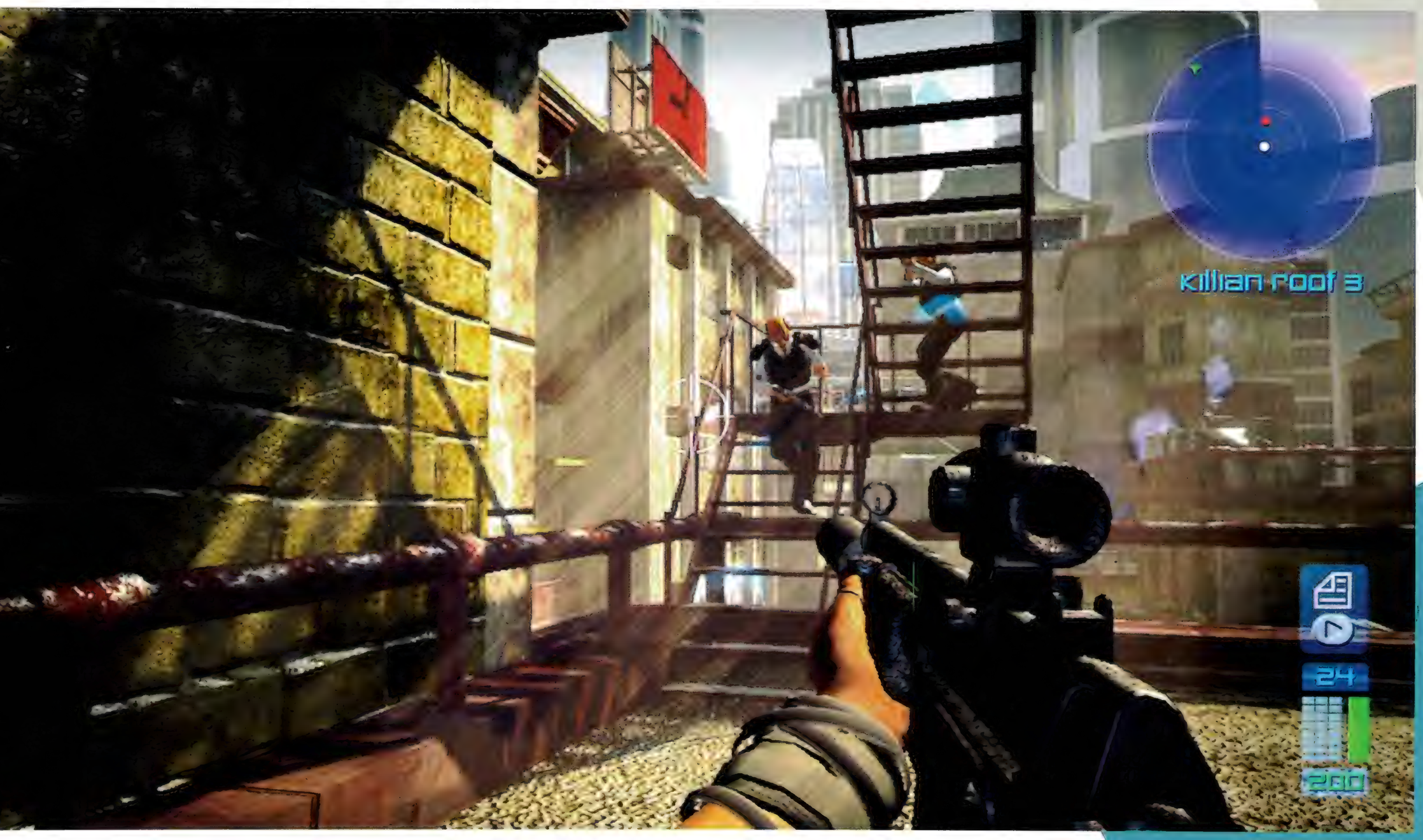
Xbox 360

Point of Interest

Rare will also offer a 2-disc box set for PDZ loaded with bonus content, a comic booklet, and a "Holographic Glyph Card".

Developer: Rare **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
Online: Full Xbox Live Support **Available:** November 22

"Rare's definitely looking to change the face of online multiplayer matches, both figuratively and literally..."



Keep your rounds fresh, otherwise you might get caught off-guard.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

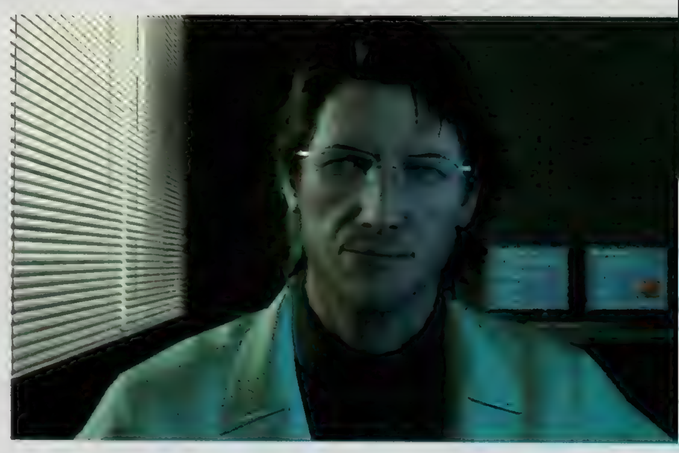
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Teaching an old Snake new tricks

Hideo Kojima is the game industry's master of hype. We should be wise to his tricks by now, should be able to look past his schemes. Instead we find ourselves in the palm of his hand, trailer after trailer. How do you top a game that single-handedly created a genre and continues to be aped by lesser developers to this day? With the mass-media mindrape of Raiden. How do you top Raiden? With Big Boss. How do you top Big Boss? Well, just take a look at this spread.

Señor Snake? Metal Gear MkII from Snatcher? Mass-produced Metal Gears swarming across vast cityscapes? Has Kojima gone mad? If so, it can only be in the best possible way. Perhaps the years of being forced to create endless Metal Gear sequels has left him a bit touched, and as much as we'd like to see an entirely new game from the man, we'll happily bow down and accept whatever he feels fit to bless us with. Initially announced back when MGS3 was first released, 4 was never meant to be directed by Hideo Kojima. One senses that the Director might be something of a perfectionist: He took over directing duties on 3 when it became clear his "younger staff" might not be up to the challenge, and history repeats itself with 4. Initially announced with the catchphrase "No place to hide – no place for Hideo!", 4 was set to be directed by his protégé, Shuyo Murata, who shared a co-writing credit on MGS3 and was the director of ZOE: The 2nd Runner. But as of May, Kojima is officially on-board, with his credit being announced at Tokyo Game Show as lead game designer, co-director, and co-writer.

Indeed, our first glimpse of the game running on a 2nd-generation PS3 devkit (finalized hardware won't be available until December) is classic Hideo tomfoolery. The Director delights in playing with his audience's expectations, and this is apparent from the very first shot, which leads the viewer into believing MGS4 might be a (gasp!) first-person shooter. A stunningly-rendered urban battlefield is revealed, with bullets flying overhead, bombs exploding, rubble and dust and scraps of paper permeating the air. But this is no cutscene. A lone combatant grips a futuristic assault rifle resembling the FN SCAR, advancing carefully through the mayhem. The entire tableau is played out via first-person camera. Various epithets ricochet across the screen: "FPS -- Forget Pre-Rendered Stuff!", "FPS -- Format? PlayStation Scenes", "FPS -- Finally a Policy Shift?" Eventually this "first-person camera", revealed to be an enemy soldier, is stylishly taken out by a lean, mulleted warrior, culminating in the proclamation: "This is no FPS. This is MGS!" Insert crowd's roar of approval here.



But wait -- what the heck's up with our boy? He appears to be in his sixties, sporting a new mechanical eyepatch. Before the viewer can quite come to grips with this revelation, the sneaking suit-wearing warrior infiltrates a bombed-out building in CQC stance. A quick sweep of the area indicates no hostilities...and he decides it's time for a smoke. At this point, ladies and gentlemen, there can no longer be any doubt. This is Solid Snake. Before he has a chance to light up, however, he is interrupted by a bomb blast, and the view shifts to the action outside: Platoons of soldiers patrolling the city streets, accompanied by tanks...and Metal Gears. Plural. Looking like minaturized versions of Metal Gear REX with RAY's organic legs grafted on beneath, these next-generation Metal Gear GEKKOU ("Moonlight" in Japanese, though possibly a play on the reptilian naming theme) appear to be piloted by AI.

Suddenly, Snake is wracked with spasms, collapsing to his knees in pain. Withdrawing a syringe from his pack, he plunges it into his neck, and soon the convulsions subside. (This scene raises numerous questions: Is Snake ill? Is this a genetic effect caused by his cloning? Is it FOXDIE? Is the serum just barely keeping him alive? Will Snake die in MGS4?) Regaining his composure, Snake switches on his optical eyepatch, labelled "SOLID EYE SYSTEM" and resembling nothing so much as a Scouter from Dragon Ball. After surveying the situation outside, Snake becomes aware of a possible threat in the very same room with him, which is revealed

to be...wait for it...Metal Gear MkII from Snatcher. Not a mecha *resembling* Metal Gear MkII, the actual article -- its official name in MGS4 is "Metal Gear MkII".

But this Metal Gear is not an enemy. The little robot extends an LCD viewscreen, on which appears Snake's old comrade Otacon, looking a few years older and piloting by remote control. After a few pleasantries are exchanged, Otacon hands Snake a fresh clip for his assault rifle -- perhaps hinting at a new game mechanic -- and the pair exit the relative safety of the bombed-out shelter, plunging into the midst of battle. The trailer ends with a cheeky lecture from Otacon on the power of the Cell processor, complete with footage of the infamous Killzone PS3 trailer. You can't help but think that Kojima might be poking fun at it.

With that said, there's not much more anybody knows about MGS4. Kojima is remaining as tight-lipped as ever, but we've compiled a list of facts gleaned from official materials, the trailer, and statements made in interviews. Until the man feels the time is right to gift us with more details, this is all we've got. Let the speculation begin.
Nick Des Barres

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots — Preview

PlayStation 3

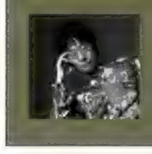
Point of Interest

See right for a plethora of MGS4 tidbits!

Developer: Kojima Productions **Publisher:** Konami
Online: TBD **Available:** TBA

What we (pretty much) know for sure about MGS4

- The game takes place "several years" after MGS2.
- Solid Snake is definitely the main playable character.
- Hideo Kojima will serve as co-director, joining previously announced director Shuyo Murata.
- Returning characters include Raiden, Otacon, Meryl Silverburgh, Revolver Ocelot, Vamp, and Naomi Hunter.
- Solid Snake has undergone premature aging due to the length of his telomeres being shorter than those of a natural-born human.
- The theme of the game is "Sense", following the "Meme", "Gene", and "Scene" of MGSs 1-3.
- The game will feature an all-new camera system, possibly based on the 3rd Person View Camera from Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence.
- Snake's enemy may not be entirely clear-cut. According to Kojima, if Snake defeats a soldier from "Country A", soldiers from "Country B" may consider him their ally, and vice-versa.
- Since the game now takes place at least a decade beyond our own time, the team has less restrictions on plausible weaponry and will introduce a futuristic weapon customization system with (reportedly) over 200 configurations.
- Snake will be supported by Metal Gear MkII, perhaps in a similar fashion to how Gillian Seed was supported by the same mecha in Snatcher.
- Somehow, psychological mind-games will become a factor in the gameplay, with the ability to intimidate enemy soldiers, and in turn be intimidated by them.
- CQC, a gameplay feature introduced in MGS3, will be carried over.
- The "!" that appears above enemies' heads when spotted, a series trademark, will probably not return.
- Online features similar to those in MGS3: Subsistence will be present.



Disclaimer: When it comes to Director Kojima, anything is possible. As much as we love him, we'll never trust him again after the Raiden Incident. Take all of the above with heaping helpings of salt.

"Has Kojima gone mad? If so, it can only be in the best possible way."

Is he or isn't he? Only Kojima knows for sure.

Legions of mass-produced Metal Gear GEKKOU prepare to put the hurt down on...somebody.

Even if all this seems astonishing, folks, let's not forget it's running on a devkit with an underclocked Cell processor and no RSX (the PS3's graphics unit). Translation: It's only going to get better looking.

ENTER THE MATRIX

PATH OF NEO

Zion or bust

I like Shiny games…a lot. It all began with a squirmy little fella by the name of Earthworm Jim and a game that did *everything* right; introducing a pile of new ideas, setting new benchmarks for animation and control, and spawning both an amazing cartoon and toy line. Next came EWJ 2, weird jogging animation and platforming on a barbeque grill (not so perfect, but great) followed by a myriad of groundbreaking, if not borderline experimental 3D games, including a PS gem by the name of Wild 9 (which I love to this day even though it was under-realized) and the world's first possession game, Messiah, which if you could get it to run featured a pudgy cherub who liked to possess and kill anyone in its path. Post Jim, Shiny had become more mad-scientist-lair than token pop-developer which was fine by me, as every other like developer had long since sputtered into obscurity. Then it happened… Just as I was dreaming of a true 3D EWJ sequel they went and landed The Matrix.

Of course the Wachowskis chose Shiny to do the honors; they were the game studio equivalent of their grand movie-making experiment. But the acquisition would send Atari into a bridge burning egomaniacal tirade, leveraging and embargoing coverage like they had discovered the iPod. Whether or not this has anything to do with the game's jaded reception is debatable, although it's hard to ignore reader reviews that rank overwhelmingly in the 7-10 range.

Even though I didn't get to chime in on Enter The Matrix, or even touch a playable until the game hit retail, I was one of few critics who sided with the game buying public (on Xbox and Game Cube at least) on a game that would go on to sell a gazillion copies after getting pummeled nearly as bad as the last two movies in the trilogy (which I also loved). In other words, the Matrix has *you*. This is one resilient franchise.

The Path of Neo was one of the industry's best kept secrets right up until E3 when we got our first taste of Shiny's answer to Enter the Matrix and there was no denying its technological prowess. The Burly Brawl perfectly represented on PS2 featuring hundreds of Agent Smiths? Pseudo-bump mapping on PS2?…The mad scientists were back at it, only something was missing. The funny (as in ironic and strange) thing is that the house that Jim built has forgotten the most crucial element of game design—the very foundation they themselves laid with EWJ.

"...the level design and gameplay are fantastic, the strides in technology mind blowing, and the presentation stellar..."

Shiny's re-creation of s Burly Brawl is a hardware defying act of sheer dedication and innovation.

As drop-dead gorgeous as Path of Neo is, Neo himself is, in a word, broken. He feels too light, has awkward running animation (spine vertical and locked in place) and lacks a tangible connection with the environment. Where he desperately needs to be dynamic (see Primal) and feel solid and ultra-reactive (see Shaolin Monks) he is neither, resulting in a strange amalgam of high-tech meets low-tech character interaction. I'd much rather have a great playing character and less detail than amazing backgrounds and a broken lead, but with Shiny at the helm shouldn't I get both? Niobe was a super cool character (imagine if Aaliyah would have finished filming) that looked and felt great so it's hard to fathom why Neo isn't following suit. My hope is that this is indicative of the early build, because otherwise this is a remarkable looking and playing game. As far as the "path" itself goes however, as gorgeous as the game is, it is so mired in training, for so long, that it's all I could do to not scream. What amounts to intuitive controls—easily outlined in the manual or on a pause menu—are demonstrated so often I felt like saying "okay, here: you play it" whilst fighting through construct after construct after construct; a series of tech demos meant to tattoo the game's control scheme directly onto your brain. There are six buttons on the controller...I'm "The One"; I can take it from there. Linked together by a patchwork of movie clips, the game covers ground above and beyond what Neo experienced in the films; a great premise to be sure that could finally put the cherry on top of one of the most awe-inspiring film trilogies of all time...if they make the tutorial optional and fix Neo.

At this juncture two months from launch, the level design and gameplay are fantastic, the strides in technology mind blowing, and the presentation stellar but if they bark out commands for the duration and give me a broken demigod I may opt for the blue pill.

Dave Halverson

The Matrix: Path of Neo

Brawler

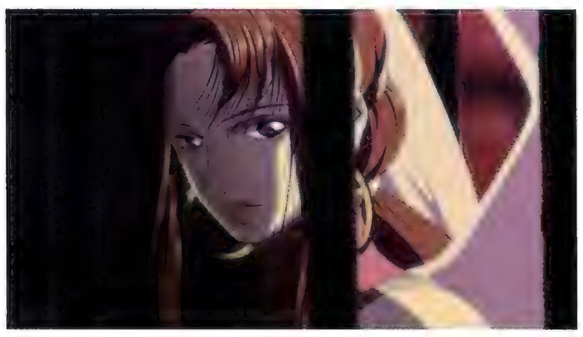
PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Point of Interest

The Matrix cost 65,000,000 to make, 20,000,000 to advertise and market, and earned a whopping 456,500,000 worldwide.

Developer: Shiny Entertainment **Publisher:** Atari
Online: None **Available:** November

"...if you're looking for a good monster crawl, you couldn't do much better..."



Neo's anime cut scenes deliver the story in fitting style.

yourself overwhelmed, in which case you must retreat; attain the necessary skills to gain ground, and dive back in, pursuing the inherent goal of ogling the next destination, and in Neo's case watching the integrated anime unfold.

Me? Well, I'm somewhat at odds with Neo; mostly because I'd much rather see the Shining name on a modern day version of either Shining in the Darkness or Shining the Holy Arc. I love anime and am totally game for the odd Dungeon Explorer or Gauntlet clone, but when it says "Shining" on the label, I expect pure gold. As pretty as Neo is, the gameplay is very repetitious and can grow wearisome, even with the added character management and story elements. That's not to say fans of the genre won't like it; a few years ago I'd have killed for an import of this ilk, so if you're looking for a good monster crawl, you couldn't do much better, especially if you like your adventures long (although I hadn't finished the game as of press time, it seems well over 30 hours in duration).

It's so ironic in this age of uber complexity that the old Japanese take on "monsters" popping through portals to take over the world, or at least help whatever evil necromancer they happen to be serving is still alive and well. I can't help but wonder what motivates them to invade Earthly realms in the first place. They can't speak or articulate a thought, don't really need housing and seem to enjoy lumbering about more than anything else, so what do they need with flower pots and kitchen tables? Perhaps they just have a penchant for gamers. Dave Halverson

Shining Force Neo

PlayStation 2

Preview

Point of Interest

Paul Chadwick was one of the first comic creators Andy and Larry Wachowski approached to create a comic story based on The Matrix, back before the first movie was even made.

Developer: Sega **Publisher:** Sega
Online: None **Available:** October

But, a problem: The swine had eaten the herbs! Somehow, Meryl convinced him to venture to where more herbs were – the forest floor.

It proved a mysterious sojourn. They saw rocklike eggs big enough to hold three men; and the Force Crystal itself – that which protects the world from the Clan of the Moon!

Max's father teased the secret of their trip out of them at the meal. Over steaming soup, Gaia explained: the Legions – monsters more terrible than the herb-thieves Max had bested, were imprisoned in those "eggs." They had been for the thirteen years since the terrible war.

Max was digesting this with his food when a soldier burst in. The worst had happened. The Legions were emerging! Gaia commanded the pair to stay inside, and rushed to battle.

Max and Meryl immediately disobeyed.

The Legions were formidable. Their loathsome, insectile forms took more sword-slashes than Max could manage; but Meryl's fiery magic helped, and they won through.

Just in time; Gaia was facing a new threat – a masked warrior who had emerged from the Force Crystal. An epic battle ensued, father and son united against the Other.

The other, who, on the verge of triumph, revealed himself.

It was Cain.

He was back.

He had changed most of all.

Betrayal

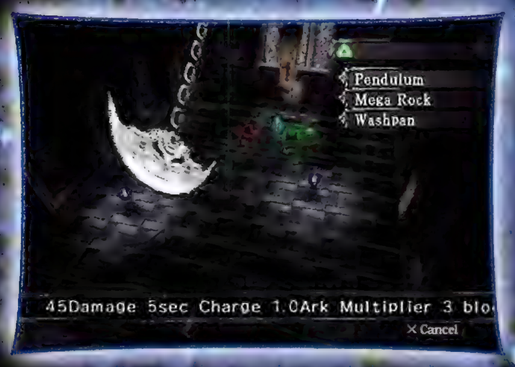
Jealousy

Friendship

Murd

Ambition

hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.



WITH THE DEVIL BY YOUR SIDE, PLAY AS PRINCESS ALLURA AS YOU LURE YOUR ENEMIES INTO YOUR SOPHISTICATED WEB OF TRAPS AND DARK ILLUSIONS, ALL IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING JUSTICE AND SAVING YOUR KINGDOM. YOU WILL PLANT A SERIES OF DEADLY TRAPS THAT WILL MAIM, BURN, BEHEAD, AND CONSUME YOUR ENEMIES' LIVES, LEAVING THEIR SOULS FOR THE DEVIL...

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

TRAPT

PlayStation®

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THE INCREDIBLES

RISE OF THE UNDERMINER

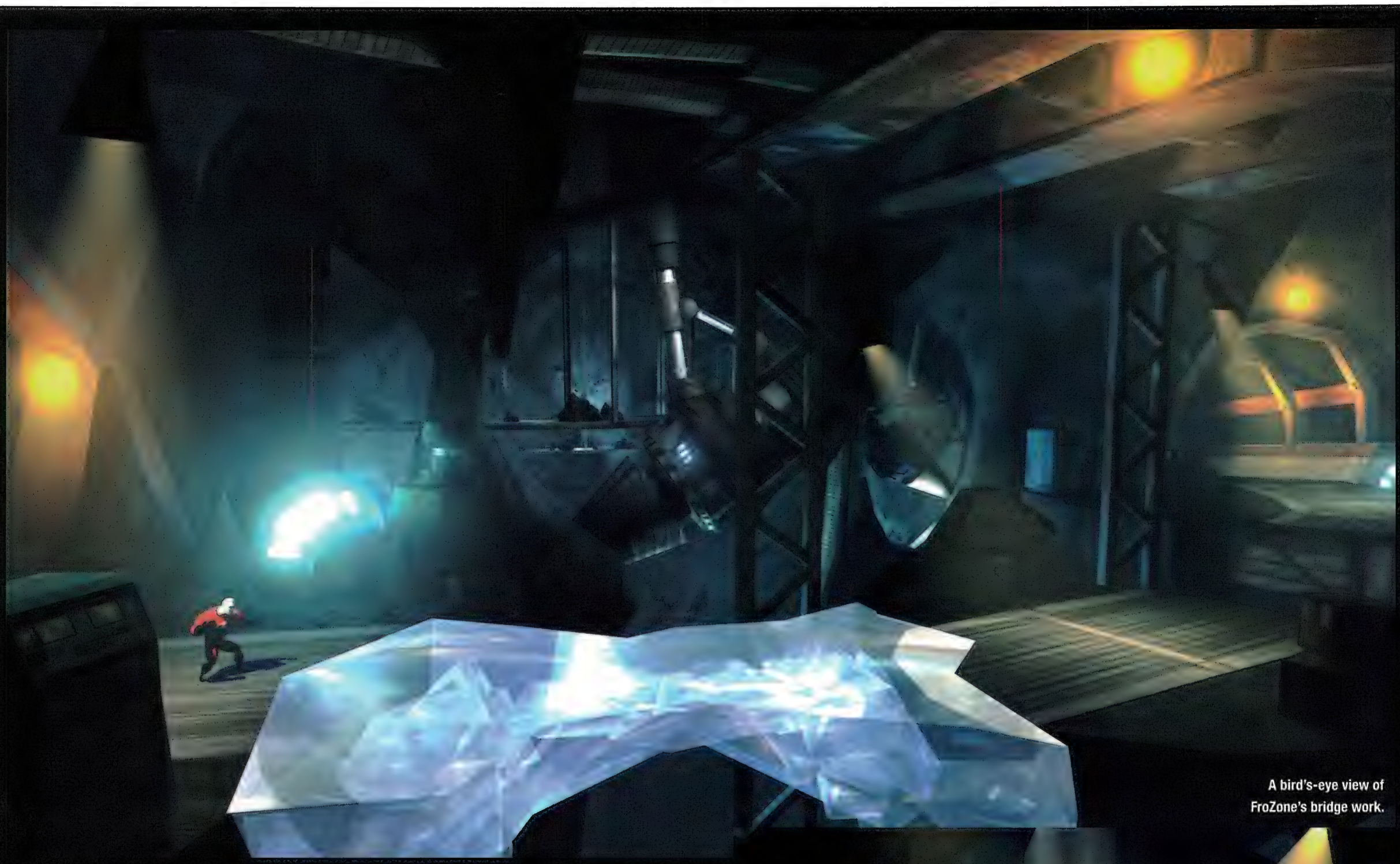
How deep does the mole hole go?

When it comes to doing right by "E for Everyone" mega-brands, THQ is truly in a class by themselves. Whether it's Jimmy Neutron, SpongeBob, Scooby Doo, or Tak and those nutty JuJu's, they always manage to crank out games that fit the kid-to-adult mold as deftly as the shows they're based on. It didn't used to be this way (Family Dog anyone?) but over the years things have definitely taken a turn for the better at Toy Headquarters, thanks in no small part to Heavy Iron, a young studio that's been cranking out the triple-A goods since game number two. Since their competent 2001 debut, Evil Dead: Hail to the King, they've gone on to create one Shagg-a-licious Scooby Doo game (Night of 100 Frights), two unforgettable SpongeBob games, the formidable companion game for The Incredibles and now are dipping toe into the uncharted waters of the Incredibles sequel, which we'll get to play rather than merely see.

Picking up exactly where the film left off as if they never yelled "cut!", the next mega villain to unhinge Metroville (or at least try), The Underminer (along with the usual scores of robot minions and a drill that looks straight out of the Zion clean up effort) comes burrowing up from the underground on a building sized drill with the usual intentions. First up to send him back from whence he came, Mr. Incredible and FroZone take to the streets in tag-team fashion (you can switch between them on the fly) with Fro able to freeze and Mr. Incredible punch and ground pound (among other things of course). From the get-go two things are crystal clear: the engine (and I played on PS2) is un-freaking believable, and you are in for one massively great movie game experience. This is how it's done boys and girls. No laborious build up

FroZone and Mr. Incredible take to (and under) the streets in Heavy Iron's incredible sequel.

"...you are in for one massively great movie game experience."



A bird's-eye view of FroZone's bridge work.

FroZone puts on the freeze and Mr. Incredible puts on the hurt.

and no obtrusive training level (rather, Fro barks out commands) just epic action from outset… and what glorious action it is. Once things are cleaned up topside it's down we go, where Fro can create ice bridges and freeze projectiles for Mr. Incredible to pick up and hurl, as they edge towards the core of The Underminer's operation, or so they think. Our demo ended after defending scientists boarding choppers with various samples no doubt to discover just how deep the mole hole goes. While we'll have to wait to see how the rest of the family gets into the act, it's fairly safe to say that this will likely go down as among the best movie games ever made, easily topping Spidey and Batman's best.

This is the way to enjoy a sequel. Forgo the 100 million dollar plus 5 year film process and go straight to the game (not that I don't demand a movie sequel too). I can only imagine how seamless a transition this is about to become on next-gen but in the meantime current gen is looking mighty heroic. Dave Halverson

The Incredibles: Rise of the Underminer — Preview

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Point of Interest

The Incredibles was the first animated film to win an Oscar for sound.

Developer: Heavy Iron Studios **Publisher:** THQ
Online: None **Available:** November 11

Bad Day L.A.

American McGee strikes back

Bad Day L.A. is a game that's going to shock you. It's going to grab you by the face, slam you into the sidewalk and then point and laugh at you. It's the latest story from the fabled American McGee, and it's going to get in your head and not give a f--- what you think.

McGee showed us how dark fairy tales could be when he came up with *American McGee's Alice*, a twisted, mind-bending game that turned Wonderland upside down. Not just anyone is brave enough to toss Alice in an insane asylum, that's for sure, and after seeing McGee's version of the Jabberwocky I had nightmares for a week. Ok, it was a lot longer than a week, but that's only a testament **to how visually stimulating (and scary) his creations can be. So in some ways, his next project came as a bit of a shock to me… American McGee, doing *comedy*? Was the world coming to an end?

Apparently the end *is* here, at least to McGee, and it's happening in Los Angeles.

So now I've got you wondering: just what kind of game *is* Bad Day L.A.? McGee's response to that oh-so-burning question would be, "Essentially what it is is a disaster spoof. It is, if you can imagine, a *Day After Tomorrow* with Dave Chapelle as the lead character in it. We're sort of going in a retro direction, a third-person action-adventure with a really heavy emphasis on simplicity. Inside of that there's sort of three elements to the gameplay. One is this overarching goal the main character has to get out of Los Angeles. So at all times he's trying to move forward to some point of escape… Essentially what happens is, every time he gets into some mode of transportation to get away from the city, some other disaster strikes."

The game in a nutshell? Los Angeles pretty much has the worst day *ever*, including terrorist attacks, alien invasions, meteor showers, zombie infestations, and Los Angeles International Airport, so much a disaster in its own right that McGee didn't need to add any other type of twisted event to its bedlam. Anthony Williams, the title character, is homeless, rude, self-serving, and just wants to get the hell out of L.A. when disaster strikes. He's the complete antithesis of your standard issue hero, but he works so well as the game's protagonist because we relate to him. If a horde of disasters hit our hometowns, we'd want nothing more than to get out of the city and never look back. McGee describes Williams as "a really reluctant hero…9 times out of 10, when he goes to save someone, he inadvertently kills them. If it's a woman, he's often trying to pick up on her… He's not a bad guy, and the point of this game is not to make light of his suffering. The point of this game is to get a conversation started about how ridiculous it is that we live in this conscious state of fear of events that may never happen to us."

> "It is, if you can imagine, a Day After Tomorrow with Dave Chapelle as the lead character in it. "
>
> American Mcgee, creator, Bad Day L.A.

It's controversial, to be sure—they've gotten letters for just about every aspect of the game, from the lead character's baby-punting ways to his penchant for picking up the ladies while people are being smote left and right—but it's also *hilarious*, a title with adult humor that will actually make you laugh out loud while you play but also makes you think about the world we've come to exist in post-9/11. McGee told us about the first time he thought about getting out his political message, recalling, "The epiphany moment came in Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard. I saw this billboard, it had this politically correct rainbow of people, like the black guy, the Asian woman, the white woman, the blue kid or whatever and they're all looking really constipated and solemn looking down on traffic, and above them it said, 'Bio Chemical Terror Attack' and then down below it said, 'Are you prepared?' And I was like, 'No, I'm not. This is so ridiculous!'"

BDLA's gameplay runs the gamut, making our homeless hero help tag-a-long "partners" rescue blow up dolls from burning buildings, and strike down infected zombies (or heal them with a fire extinguisher). "At its heart, it's not really a shooter," McGee explains. "It's more like a chaos management game. There's a threat advisory level, and whenever you perform a positive action, you'll see these little smiley faces come up…whenever you perform a negative action, you get frownies. So if I kill these guys for no reason, that will generate a frown, and that adds to the threat advisory. As that moves up, the game becomes more and more difficult, the scenarios become more and more chaotic. So… while you've got these missions that you're trying to accomplish, you're also trying to constantly manage the chaos inside of the world. You can run around shooting stuff, it's definitely

a shooter, but it's not like we're advising you to just go around murdering people for the sake of murdering people. There's definitely repercussions to his actions."

As with every other McGee-stamped license, expect Bad Day L.A. to have an artistic style all its own. BDLA looks like a walking, talking airplane emergency card, and the instruction manual for the game *is* an emergency procedure card. It's simple, but it works. Nail clippers are an ultimate weapon when you're navigating the perilous terminals of LAX (it's Bad Day L.A.'s BFG, if you will) and there's no shortage of cartoon gore throughout the game. Simply put, Bad Day L.A. looks to be the kind of game we need right now; it dares to push the envelope at a time where poking fun at our own fear is taboo.

Ashley Esqueda

Bad Day L.A.

Xbox, PC

Preview

Point of Interest

American McGee actually resides in Hong Kong… how's that for irony?

Developer: Enlight Software **Publisher:** Enlight Software
Available: Q1 2006

"It's controversial, to be sure—they've gotten letters for just about every aspect of the game..."

It's controversial, to be sure—they've gotten letters for just about every aspect of the game, from the lead character's baby-punting ways to his penchant for picking up the ladies while people are being smote left and right—but it's also *hilarious*, a title with adult humor that will actually make you laugh out loud while you play but also makes you think about the world we've come to exist in post-9/11. McGee told us about the first time he thought about getting out his political message, recalling, "The epiphany moment came in Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard. I saw this billboard, it had this politically correct rainbow of people, like the black guy, the Asian woman, the white woman, the blue kid or whatever and they're all looking really constipated and solemn looking down on traffic, and above them it said, 'Bio Chemical Terror Attack' and then down below it said, 'Are you prepared?' And I was like, 'No, I'm not. This is so ridiculous!'"

BDLA's gameplay runs the gamut, making our homeless hero help tag-a-long "partners" rescue blow up dolls from burning buildings, and strike down infected zombies (or heal them with a fire extinguisher). "At its heart, it's not really a shooter," McGee explains. "It's more like a chaos management game. There's a threat advisory level, and whenever you perform a positive action, you'll see these little smiley faces come up…whenever you perform a negative action, you get frownies. So if I kill these guys for no reason, that will generate a frown, and that adds to the threat advisory. As that moves up, the game becomes more and more difficult, the scenarios become more and more chaotic. So… while you've got these missions that you're trying to accomplish, you're also trying to constantly manage the chaos inside of the world. You can run around shooting stuff, it's definitely

a shooter, but it's not like we're advising you to just go around murdering people for the sake of murdering people. There's definitely repercussions to his actions."

As with every other McGee-stamped license, expect Bad Day L.A. to have an artistic style all its own. BDLA looks like a walking, talking airplane emergency card, and the instruction manual for the game *is* an emergency procedure card. It's simple, but it works. Nail clippers are an ultimate weapon when you're navigating the perilous terminals of LAX (it's Bad Day L.A.'s BFG, if you will) and there's no shortage of cartoon gore throughout the game. Simply put, Bad Day L.A. looks to be the kind of game we need right now; it dares to push the envelope at a time where poking fun at our own fear is taboo.

Ashley Esqueda

Bad Day L.A.

Xbox, PC

Preview

Point of Interest

American McGee actually resides in Hong Kong… how's that for irony?

Developer: Enlight Software **Publisher:** Enlight Software
Available: Q1 2006

"It's controversial, to be sure—they've gotten letters for just about every aspect of the game..."

Post mortem

for...

Death Jr.

In Death there is new life, or so they say. We caught up with DJ Executive Producer Chris Charla to exhume the latest on the exploits of Death's impish offspring.

As the reviews pour in from both the press and consumers do you feel that Death Jr. has lived up to your expectations as the first big original PSP action game?
Well, I think it's safe to say that we're never going to be satisfied; we always think we can do better. But it's been really gratifying to see all the positive reviews and forum postings. Some of the reviews were less positive and we're trying to learn everything we can from those as well.

A spattering of gamers seem to be at odds with the camera even though you can snap it behind DJ, lock it in and strafe, which only leaves camera jams in tight spaces to squabble about. Is this something you'll be addressing in DJ 2?
I think people who are used to very standard platforming controls and camera were less comfortable with the "camera relative" shooting style of DJ; it really controlled more like a shooter, and players who wanted it to control like a standard platform game may have been frustrated, which sucks, and we apologize for that. Some people I think had more trouble getting the hang of it, or had more trouble dealing with the loss of the second analog stick, which was a bummer. I think there are a couple of small tweaks we could have made that would have felt nicer, and I also think we should have done a better job educating people about how to use the camera correctly.
Looking forward, we've learned a lot about camera and shooting controls for third-person action games and we're currently experimenting with a number of new styles which we think will solve the problem for everyone.

"The PSP is really powerful, but it is its own platform, and I think the best reviews and reviewers keep that in mind."

What about the percentage of shooting versus platforming? I know I wanted more even though the shooting and melee are awesome. Happy with where it's at or under internal scrutiny?
We were pretty happy with the levels, but we were concentrating on the combat, versus making things platform intensive. I think if we did a similar game in the future, we'd probably still have the same level of combat, but up the platforming to make an even more compelling experience.

I think I gave DJ his highest score among enthusiast press which I attribute to many things (aside from having an affinity for ghoulish critters and impeccable taste) like character and world design, music, tactical shooting, pacing, difficulty etc. as they pertain to *mobile* gaming. A lot of the reviews I've read don't seem to take the format (single analog and all) into account. It's a different animal isn't it?
In one sense it's super gratifying to be compared to Ratchet and Clank or other PS2 games! It shows we really raised the bar. On the other hand, it's really frustrating to be compared directly to games on a platform that in many ways has some intrinsic advantages over PSP (namely, the second analog), and found lacking. I mean, I love Untold Legends, but I don't think it compares directly to a PS2 game, and I don't judge it against PS2 games. The PSP is really powerful, but it is its own platform, and I think the best reviews and reviewers keep that in mind.
Some of the highest reviews came from the non-gaming press, people like the LA Times, San Jose Mercury News, and Detroit Free Press. I think these reviewers may have approached the game with more of an open opinion on the game, versus seeing that the game looked a certain way, and thus expecting it to play a certain way, so that was really interesting to us.

Speaking of which how is it that DJ loads so much less than almost every other PSP game and still looks so good?
We have some great technical know-how on our team, and we made short load-times a real priority! I think you'll see everyone have short load times as well in second-generation games, but we really wanted to get them short, because we hate waiting for games ourselves! This was a lot of work, especially with the size of our levels (some were upwards of 64MB, which is well above the PSP's 24MB usable RAM), but I think the team did an awesome job minimizing the between-level load times, and the in-level load times (which I think are totally non-existent). Doing that in a way that didn't crush the battery life was a big job, but our guys pulled it off really admirably.

I imagine you've received quite a bit of feedback on your end regarding all things DJ. Any particularly cool or better yet, strange?
Well, we had one person who sent in the game to us in an envelope… he had gotten frustrated at one point and thrown the game against a wall and totally destroyed the UMD! So, we sent him a new copy and he was happy, that was pretty funny. I have the destroyed UMD taped up on my wall now. I've definitely destroyed some controllers and carts in my time, so I could really sympathize! (At one point in Halo 2 I had to stop playing because I broke the controller, and it was my only S-type controller.)

What's the latest on the anime?
Unlike games, Anime takes a long time. It's still very early, and we're just as excited to see what's happening with it. The people involved are perfectionists, so we just have to be patient.

Have you and Konami considered bringing DJ to console? I reckon the new Revolution controller and the scythe would make for some interesting gameplay…
These people installed a restraining bolt in my neck, and it's making me say: "Death, Jr. has been very successful and we're happy with how well it's done, so we're evaluating the possibility of sequels."

I figured as much. How's the game doing? Best selling PSP game yet? Are you pleased with the numbers?
I'm trying to answer, but my restraining bolt is… "Death, Jr. has been very successful and we're happy with how well it's done, so we're evaluating the possibility of sequels."

Bah! So if you could have done one thing differently what would it have been?
We would have spent more time on the tutorial. There are a lot of things that are very important to playing the game (like realizing you need to tap L to fully lock on after the first enemy is killed while strafing) that only come up once. If you don't read carefully, you can easily skip past them, and then it's only in the manual, which no one reads. That makes for a way more frustrating experience.

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Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PC

When the Prince of Persia, along with Kaileena—everyone's favorite Empress of Time—return home to their beloved Babylon, where they thought they'd find peace…only pain greets them. The kingdom ravaged by war and Kaileena the target of a brutal plot, the ensuing twists are beyond brutal and sets off a chain of events that should equate to the ultimate sequel. Montreal Studios have mixed things up considerably this time, allowing us to explore both sides of the prince's divided soul via two playable characters, a new "Speed Kill" system, open world Babylon environments, and…chariot racing that'd make Ben Hur fake sick. Looks too good to be true does it not? So does King Kong; must be something in the water in Montreal. **Dave Halverson**

Dev: Ubisoft: Montreal Studios **Pub:** Ubisoft **Available:** December

Test Drive Unlimited

Xbox 360

Taking the racing to the winding roads of Hawaii, Test Drive Unlimited offers immense customization of both bikes and high-performance cars. The online component is getting big attention, where you can compete for all sorts of rare parts, new rides, clothing and even the garages you hold it all in. It's all in the details: windows open, the radio works, wipers whisk away the weather. Because the cars are licensed behemoths, you'll have access to upgrades from actual catalogues. **Brady Fiechter**

Dev: Eden Games **Pub:** Atari **Available:** TBA

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana 2

PlayStation 2

With any luck Gust's Atelier Iris 2 will address the minor issues that plagued the first; namely Landstalker jumping on isometric fields that had improper or broken collision, and the odd boring map. Otherwise this an absolutely spectacular brand of RPG featuring among the best battle systems around presented in lovely 2D with large well animated sprites. The sequel, about an alchemist named Felt, on a journey of self discovery focuses (like the first game) on dual leads, this time sharing a common items pouch but venturing out solo while one stays behind to forge weapons, manage items and basically hold down the fort. It sure would be great to get a version of Atelier that plays as great as it looks. **Dave Halverson**

Dev: Gust **Pub:** NIS America **Available:** TBA

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Dead Rising

Xbox 360

One of the most talked about but mysterious "launch window" (more like a sliding glass door) Xbox 360 titles; new TGS screens have surfaced for Capcom's Dead Rising, which seems to be taking shape. Clearly not the Dynasty Warriors with zombies we feared, our protagonist Frank West seems to have a Tarentino tinged female in tow that we think is his girlfriend although there is no word yet on whether she's playable in single or two-player, via Live or what have you, as Capcom are remaining tight lipped on the subject. As zombie outbreaks go this looks like a bad one though (which is good for us) so lets hope it's a great game too. Usually when Capcom and zombies get together the results speak for themselves. **Dave Halverson**

Dev: Capcom **Pub:** Capcom **Available:** TBA 2006

Fatal Frame 3: The Tormented

PlayStation 2

Fatal Frame 3: The Tormented is taking the unsettling mood of this effective survival horror series a step further, focusing on creepier ghosts and more story detail. For this latest installment, a photographer named Rei finds an image of her dead fiancé in one of her pictures taken at an old abandoned house, setting the wheels in motion for another jaunt into psychological terror with the camera obscura. She meets up with a pair of characters who also become playable, alternating between a dream world and reality. **Brady Fiechter**

Dev: Tecmo **Pub:** Tecmo **Available:** November

Need For Speed Most Wanted

Xbox 360, PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC

In motion, the Xbox 360 version of Wanted (shown) glides regally. Most intriguing, perhaps, are its challenge races, wherein drivers must alternately evade and then escape from the police. Bolstered by an interesting new "Speedbreaker" feature, chases can be slowed down dramatically for a few seconds, allowing for last-second escapes and providing a car with extra mass to plow through peril. Drifting provides for extra speedbreaker time, and pursuit breaker obstacles such as gas stations and grounded boats litter the courses, waiting for some car to destroy them and thus distract the black and whites. Just like in real life. **Greg Orlando**

Dev: EA Canada **Pub:** Electronic Arts **Available:** October

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The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Seeing the trilogy of books that jump started my imagination as a wee lad come to life in a game is a bit on the strange side especially with the childrens' icons plastered on places in the environment where their skills are needed but I'm not passing judgment just yet. Set up in co-op utility form, where each child has a designated gift to help solve a series of action puzzles and the like (at least early on), Narnia arrived at the tail end of the Nov. cycle so I didn't spend nearly enough time with the game to give you a comprehensive report, although I can attest that is spectacular to look at. Early on the amount of prodding is a bit much for my taste but, hopefully it lets up by the time Aslan shows. **Dave Halverson**

Dev: Traveller's Tales **Pub:** The Wardrobe **Available:** November 14

The Movies

PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Ok, so you've got the makeover building to keep your actor's looking good and happy about their appearance. The director has been honed for your hand-picked sci-fi script. The budget has accounted for rehab, PR, marketing, sound stages, salaries, everything you can possibly think of. The studio's decorated with all kinds of shrubbery and specific walkways to keep traffic moving smoothly. It's all in order, but… your movie ends up sucking hard, getting awful reviews and pathetic grosses. Just more incentive to learn and improve for the next round of filming.
Brady Fiechter

Dev: Lionhead Studios **Pub:** Activision **Available:** November

Time Shift

Xbox, Xbox 360, PC

The world has been annihilated. The record of our existence has been erased. But it's all good, because you have this time-traveling suite, and you get to manipulate time and make it all better. While the story plays around the idea of time travel, the concept actually affects gameplay, allowing you to deal with puzzles and shift the action through your exploits. Combat involves such weapons as plasmas guns, hybrid grenades, and the swarm cannon. **Brady Fiechter**

Dev: Saber Interactive **Pub:** Atari **Available:** Fall

Trapt

PlayStation2

Headed up by the team responsible for Deception and essentially working off the same concept, Trapt takes place in old Europe castle, where the devil and general evil doings are on the loose. You play as the vengeful Allura, bent on mutilating her enemies with medieval traps, reveling in their gory demise. Confrontations are more indirect, requiring thought over reflex. The castle is intricate and vast, offering a number of devilish scenarios. **Brady Fiechter**

Dev: Tecmo **Pub:** Tecmo **Available:** December

Stubbs the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse

Xbox

Bet you never thought you'd get to be the zombie…Now you can munch brains, chase hot women, and cause a complete nuisance while turning the retro futuristic utopian city of Punchbowl completely on its ear. Meet Stubbs; gaming's first and only traveling salesman turned zombie. The gameplay here—riding on the Halo engine no less—is like no other as Stubbs traverses the land eating brains to create willing minions (he can signal and control them; even shove them in harms way) while infiltrating the massive cityscape. Vehicles, weapons, you name it; it's in here, and is it ever hilarious. It may sound like a gimmick but this is a well-produced and polished game that I can truly say is like no other. **Dave Halverson**

Dev: ASPYR **Pub:** Wideload Games **Available:** October

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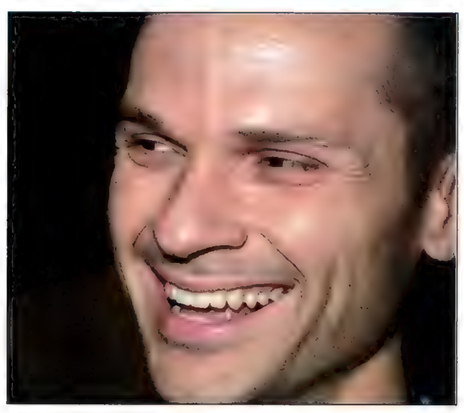

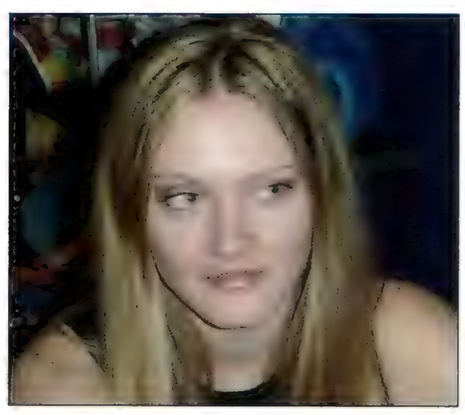

Reviews

November 2005

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Dave Halverson
Editor in Chief

Dave critiques every game based on how well it hits its target audience, and has been practicing what he preaches in print for 13 years. He truly lives for his games. Within everything Dave writes, you will also find a little bit of his personal love of the art of gaming and game creation, the driving force in his life outside of music and actual human interaction.

Favorite genres: Platformers, adventure, motocross, action-RPGs, 2D
Now playing: Castlevania: Curse of Darkness, Magna Carta, GunstarSH
Favorite Franchise: Castlevania

Brady Fiechter
Executive Editor

Brady feels that when you've been playing video games since video games were invented, you tend to start to look past the unnecessary need to boil a game down to its mechanical parts and start to see the artistry and spirit of imagination that goes into its creation. It's never as simple as polygons and cool explosions.

Favorite genres: Adventure, first-person shooters, action, RPGs
Now playing: Shadow of the Colossus, Jak X: Combat Racing
Favorite Franchise: Castlevania

Ashley "Veela" Esqueda
Senior Editor

First thing's first: Ashley's convinced that everyone with an ounce of common sense should have a contingency plan in the event of a widespread zombie infestation. Other than that, she greatly enjoys pleying games that enchant and entertain, whether through sound or sight. She frequently waxes poetic about the merits of life, love, and video games.

Favorite genres: Action, RPGs, FPS, MMORPGs, adventure, platformers
Now playing: PoPoLoCrois, Karaoke Revolution Party
Favorite Franchise: Castlevania

Mike Griffin
PC Editor

Even as a wee lad playing Zaxxon on Coleco, the technology and artistry of game design has always fascinated Mike. He thinks some games are timeless in that respect, whether 2D, 3D, flat-shaded or bump mapped. Mike's goal is to equip the readers with accurate information, so that limited funds and time can be put to good use.

Favorite genres: MMORPGs, first-person shooters, action-adventure
Now playing: Guild Wars, Battlefield 2, World of Warcraft
Favorite Franchise: Sonic

Greg Orlando
Associate Editor

Of Greg Orlando, historians agree that he is, without question, the finest human being to be mentioned in this sentence. A veteran of the Cola Wars thrice decorated, Orlando understands the universe's great solitary truth: If the mule don't kick, you know the mule don't ride. He is currently missing, presumed pantsless..

Favorite genres: Rhythm panic and monster nurturing
Now playing: Burnout Revenge, The Warriors
Favorite Franchise: Toejam and Earl

Michael Hobbs
Art Director

A gamer since Space Invaders, Michael has a soft spot for 2D shooters and other games that directly engage the player. Nintendo certainly ranks high on his list of favorite developers, and though recent forays into the world of MMORPGs have rather consumed him, he'll always have time for a game of Bangaio.

Favorite genres: Action, racing, adventure, alternative, shooters
Now playing: Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow
Favorite Franchise: Mario

Dragon Quest VIII 026

The ultimate 3D rebirth is the epitome of traditional role-playing. There is no finer RPG in all the land.

Rating System

Our scores represent both a game's technical merits and our personal opinions based on our expertise within each genre, of which the numbers alone do not necessarily tell the whole story. A perfect 10 represents a game that is flawless in the reviewer's opinion. Such a high standard means that 10s will be incredibly rare, but when it happens, it symbolizes that this game isn't just the very best—it's the best of the best.

10...**Perfect**
9....**Extraordinary**
8....**Great**
7....**Good**
6....**Decent**
5....**Average**
4....**Below average**
3....**Poor**
2....**Bad**
1....**Terrible**

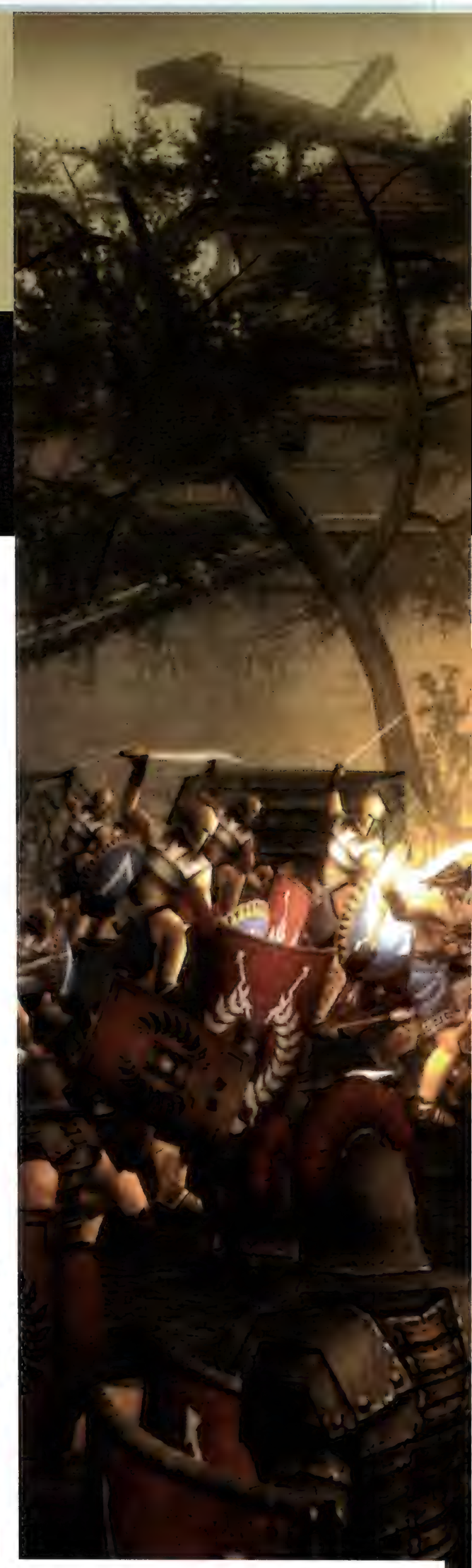
SPARTAN
TOTAL WARRIOR
Be the barbarian

Rome is everywhere you turn these days, including Sega's inspired and refreshing new take on Sparta's last stand against the invading and seemingly invincible Roman Empire. This is definitely a trend I can get behind; In contrast to far too many games depicting the painful reality of modern day urban debauchery, games predating the birth of Christ are justifiably rooted in carnage, as early civilizations bent on global domination combed the flat Earth in service of their respective empires' thirst for ultimate power…

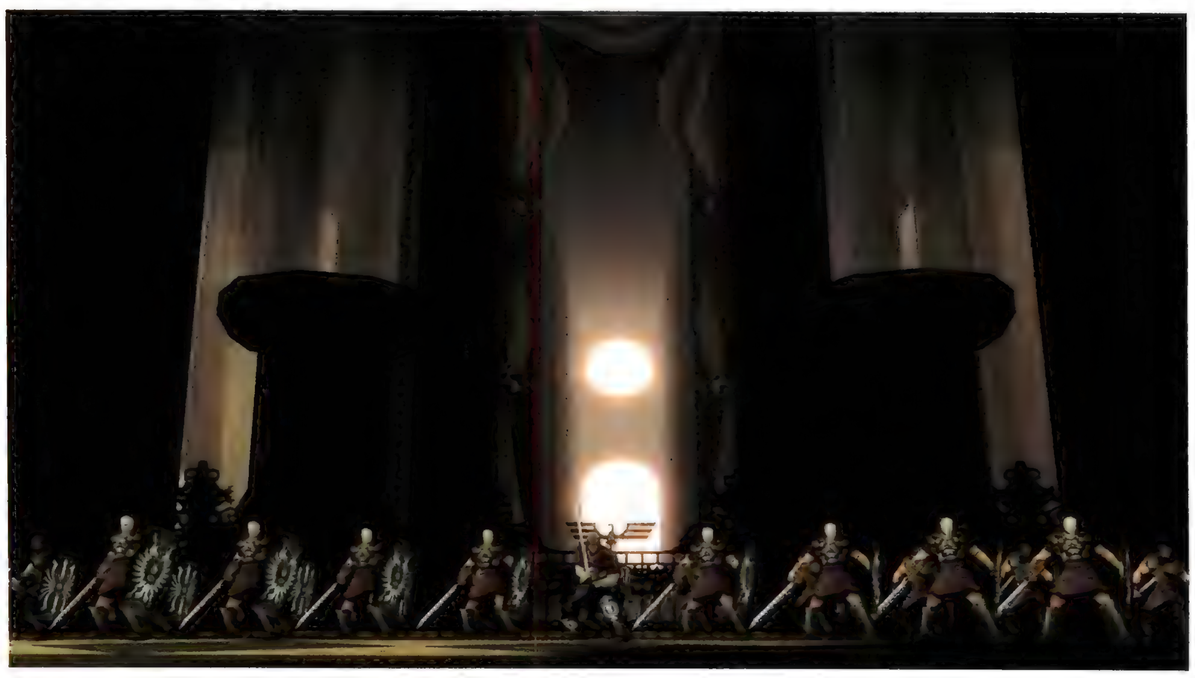
In the wake of insurmountable odds, with Greece fallen and Sparta's greatest warriors slaughtered, King Leonidas calls upon the newly trained reserves to hold the city walls—among them one very special warrior guided by the God of War himself, Ares. Through him Ares will deliver his vengeance on Rome, initially by defending Sparta and then by leaving it, venturing out into the unknown to rip the empire's heart out from the bowels of Troy.

Unlike more rigid historical fare, STW takes matters in a bold new direction by combining traditional warfare—using a spectacular move set that deftly incorporates every button on the control pad—with mythology, sorcery, and all out invention. I'm pretty sure Rome didn't possess a beam weapon powered by Medusa's gaze, but it's easily the second best way to get stoned I've come across. What's more is that it's set to arcade-style audio prods and a rapturous fusion of drum 'n bass over traditional Romanesque arrangements. Spartan Total Warrior doesn't remind me of anything before it, which is extremely rare.

Initially taken in by its scope and fresh take on scripted scenarios regardless of the focal point (you can move seamlessly from panoramic to close-up views at will), the game throws its first curve in short order. As much as I enjoy dispatching enemy hordes and slathering uninvited



"Spartan Total Warrior doesn't remind me of anything before it, which is extremely rare."



guests with boiling oil, the first segue is as welcome as the PS2-defying engine it rides on. On Ares' diktat, the second order of business is an unexpected covert mission into an immense Roman encampment to steal back a pair of sacred blades, which is also where we meet Electra, Princess of the Amazons (just as I was craving a pivotal female) and ultimately embark on the larger quest en route to Troy, with her and your kinsmen by your side, to obtain the Spear of Achilles. What begins as the defense of Sparta quickly spirals into an epic cinematic adventure paved with diversity amidst massive environmental puzzles and real time tactical battles. The play mechanics and scenarios run the gamut and you never know what's around the corner: Protection, search and destroy, mass slaughter, demolitions, eerie solo treks, environmental puzzles, boss and mini-boss battles…it's all inside, and decidedly different in execution. The only fly in the ointment (and it really isn't, given the engine and hardware limitations) is that the models up close appear blocky, but they are textured and silhouetted very well so it's barely a blip on the radar given how many and how much is being displayed on screen. Imagining what Spartan would look like on 360 or PS3 with normal mapping and detailed character models, Sega would be well served to begin working on a next-gen sequel right away.

Amidst a fall season clogged with sequels, retreads and few fresh experiences, Spartan Total Warrior should be at the very top of your list regardless of which console you own, especially if you're flying solo with a GameCube, in which case this is among the year's very best.
Dave Halverson

Can you imagine this kind of magnificence come next-gen?

Spartan: Total Warrior — **9.0** Score

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Robust engine, diverse gameplay, lots of unlockables, great soundtrack, and reanimated skeletons!

Models are a little blocky up close but it's to be expected, and the voice acting is a little flat in spots.

Developer: Creative Assembly **Publisher:** Sega
Online: None **Available:** September

Resident Evil 4

Brawn of the dead...

The new hat theory of video game development states that that which sells can be made to sell again, provided its port or next iteration goes out the door with the tiniest of alterations (a new bonnet, if you will) – just enough to warrant a $40 price tag, a change in venue, or upping the number after its title by one. For years, Capcom's creepy Resident Evil series coasted on the strength of its George A. Romero world-gone-wrong horrors and the new hat; the games sold and sold, so there was no need to change the awkward control system, the shambling zombie antagonists, and so-clever-as-to-be-obtuse puzzles.

With Resident Evil 4 for the Nintendo GameCube, Capcom took the new hat and fed it to the wood chipper. The game was a brilliant reworking and reimagining of the series, one firmly rooted in the Evil universe but with the guts to leap off into new territory. More to the point: Evil 4 was also honest enough to admit changes were needed, and made them. Protagonist Leon Kennedy still maneuvered through the freakshow in the third-person, but did so this time with a camera following him from behind his shoulder, making the terror seem more immediate than it ever did in the previous versions' more detached and pulled-away views. Evil 4 also shifted its emphasis away from cramped, claustrophobic survival horror toward a more fast-paced and action-oriented run-and-gun style adventure with the hero being plagued by foes that didn't shamble but outright sprinted. Kennedy as an action hero was fleshed out with new moves; his great feats of derring-do included getting off spectacular shots to deflect projectiles thrown at him and punishing stunned enemies by grabbing them from behind and issuing brain-crushing suplexes. And when Kennedy flirted with his handler Hunnigan, or took a petty but rather satisfying revenge on a diminutive foe by shooting at his listening device to give the creep an earache, there was a sense, too, that the man behind the action hero was also given some much-needed attention.

Capcom turned the venerable but stagnant series around with Evil 4. The game proved itself to be the best in the series, deftly outdoing its charming but somewhat clumsy predecessors by creating a fluid hero who moved freely among a series of nimble adversaries. The game quickened its pace and toned down the puzzles that served to arrest the previous titles' momentum, and in doing so found itself a new breathless horror that powered the game through to its conclusion. In its excellence, the game fairly screamed for a new (and larger) market. Something this delightfully Evil needed its terror shared.

> "Capcom turned the venerable but stagnant series around with Evil 4."

Proving it hadn't totally scrapped its shrewd business strategy, Capcom has released Resident Evil 4 for PlayStation 2. Changes between the versions are minimal, with the PlayStation version sporting an all-new minigame titled Separate Ways for the morally ambiguous supporting character Ada Wong, some small few costume and weapon additions, and the option to use a television's progressive scan. Aesthetically, the game remains unchanged. The entirety of the main game remains unaltered as well, or has been modified in such tiny ways as to defeat detection. This is Resident Evil 4 with a fine new chapeau, and the only question that remains to be asked is if the new topper is finery worth donning. Greg Orlando

Relentless, infected... and smelly.

Resident Evil 4

9.0 Score

PlayStation 2

Seperate Ways

Old game, new hat

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom
Online: None **Avail:** September

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Shin Megami Tensei Digital Devil Saga 2

Dance with the devil

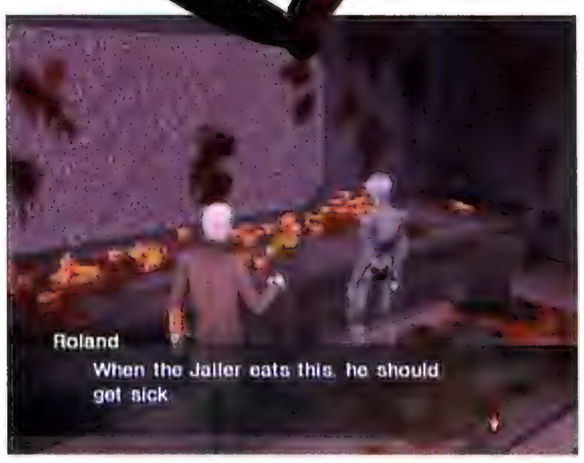
RPG fans only had to wait 6 months for the sequel to Atlus Co.'s Digital Devil Saga, and while it's similar in presentation, it's sure to strike a chord with fans of the original. When we last saw Serph, he and his comrades had reached Nirvana, only to discover the people petrified with horrific looks on their faces... Setting out to discover why the innocent citizens of Nirvana are trapped in stone, Serph encounters an entirely new adventure to tackle, and the open-ended leveling system, artistry, and one-of-a-kind gameplay begins anew.

For those of you not familiar with the Digital Devil Saga universe, part of the fun is the ability to transform your party members into the demons they've been imbued with, pulling off combos and upgrading their special attacks as you progress through the game. Experience rises fairly quickly, although towards the end I felt that slight tug of a grind while putting the final touches on my minions. Speaking of the characters, Serph and Co. are magnificently portrayed. Who else but Atlus would devise a character so sinister that she has boobs with gaping maws? Your companions might seem pretty dull at first, but oncetransformed, it's a whole different ballgame model-wise. The devils they morph into are exquisitely creepy, while retaining a semblance of eerie beauty that's grown increasingly rare in recent years. Their attacks are fascinating to watch, as their parts animate and twist so oddly you'll find yourself tilting your head on occasion, watching them bring the pain.

The leveling system in DDS2 is quite interesting to utilize. You're placed in the middle of a hexagonal grid (created by smaller hexagons) where each unit is either a new skill or a level-up for a skill you already possess while certain tiles cannot be accessed for training until a particular character learns all of the abilities surrounding it, making for some very open-ended character customization. We'll never see materia in an RPG again (although I'm still one of the few holding out for a miracle), but this turned out to be a system I enjoyed immensely. Being able to thoroughly customize any of my party members really allowed me to stretch my wings and experiment with each character.

All technical aspects aside, your gameplay experience in DDS2 is what truly makes it worthy of the upper echelon of RPG-dom. The characters exhibit excellent story arc and development, and the cutscenes are indeed a fine bit of eye candy. I said it before and I'll say it again... it's not groundbreaking, but it's more than good enough for traditional RPG fans.

Ashley Esqueda



"The devils they morph into are exquisitely creepy, while retaining a semblance of eerie beauty..."

Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2 — **8.5** Score

PlayStation 2

Great story, the character models are beautiful, and the leveling system isn't mired in traditional RPG constraints

Not groundbreaking, and the musical score is forgettable

Developer: Atlus Co. **Publisher:** Atlus Co.
Online: None **Available:** October

The cinemas only accentuate the malevolent character design.

TEEN
T
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

MTV GAMES

PlayStation 2

XBOX

MAJESCO ENTERTAINMENT

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Ratchet DEADLOCKED

Meaner and leaner

Gleemon Vox is in need of heros, but not that typical save-the-galaxy-from-evil-domination need. Being the ratings-hungry intergalactic media mogul that he is, and a bit evil, Mr. Vox steals world saviors to compete in his deadly underground gladiatorial competition known as Dreadzone. Ratchet's the next contestant, kidnapped for the show to battle it out in arenas of robot death and destruction.

What, no Clank? Ratchet's trusty sidekick has been left to tool around home-base prison, where Ratchet returns periodically after claiming victory over a specific planet before opening up the next wave of competitions. It's a good time for the humorous announcers to take a few pot-shots as well, and a good time for Insomniac to assault us with their sharp writing.

In place of Clank and his more platforming-centric abilities are a pair of destroyer bots, who are constantly by your side, deployed to help with such tasks as direct combat, igniting nodes, placing grind wires and other helpful devices like EMP grenades that bring down shields. While there are a few sections that require jumps, grinds, climbs and other staple series mechanics, Ratchet: Deadlocked mostly hinges on its manic, ceaseless action. Vehicles continually come into play, from lumbering tank-like behemoths to speedy hover bikes, and a lot the weapons you've become accustomed to are available for purchase, gradually upgrading through experience and open to modifications.

"...Ratchet: Deadlocked mostly hinges on its manic, ceaseless action."

The world environment has been replaced with compartmentalized, quick-playing action stretches that are varied and intensely chaotic. Don't think of them as arenas as much a more complex, broadly structured levels—a more abrupt way of packaging the still-familiar Ratchet and Clank gameplay. Online, all the single-player and co-op missions are available for highly customizable, ten-player bouts. Capture the flag and deathmatch are fun enough, but the siege-like juggernaut and crazy king of the hill quickly became my favorite. The deepest of the bunch is the conquest mode, which is an extension of the siege mode from Ratchet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal where you capture groups of nodes.

The single-player campaign is long and satisfying, allaying any worries that Ratchet: Deadlocked abandoned the series roots for all-out multiplayer. There's a sense that Insomniac wanted to go out with a quick, clean fourth installment without too much hassle and strain. It may be time for the series to retire, but any fan would be remiss to stay away from a possible final hurrah. Brady Fiechter

Customizable weaponry gives Ratchet fun toys to play with.

Ratchet: Deadlocked — 8.5 Score

PlayStation 2

- Alpha and Omega mods add to weapon strategies, strong new direction for the series
- Doesn't feel as robust as past Ratchet & Clank games

Developer: Insomniac **Publisher:** SCEA
Online: 10-player **Available:** October

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Shadow of the Colossus

A moving adventure

How endlessly we kill our adversaries, paying no attention to intent or consequence. Guns fire, bombs explode, fists and swords crack their mark over and over again, piling up death after death, and we move on to the next stop. The best game violence is engaging and fun, intense and strategic, but it is possible to feel something beyond the mundane when we're confronting our adversary. Shadow of Colossus understands this. It is a game of tremendous emotion, of sadness and exhilaration, tragedy and wonder. You stare into the eyes of its giant adversaries and see a presence staring back, as worthy of survival as the character you've become. What a special experience this is.

The colossi dwell in various regions of the magnificent world you've entered, scattered about to be discovered as you ride your horse, Agro, over the vast landscape. There's a myth that their spilled essence contains the power of resurrection. A person very dear to you is lying on an alter in the center of their home, and she must receive this life-giving sacrifice.

You will kill these beautiful beings, with no real understanding as to their existence, and this is part of Shadow of the Colossus' emotional resonance. It is a game of mystery and the mystical, communicating through the spirit of discovery in a way its predecessor ICO did before it. The game plays out in the depths of your imagination, binding you to grand visions that truly must be seen: The awesome serpent who takes you through the sky as you struggle to stay on its back. The towering giant of stone and moss who sweeps his club into the surrounding temple, bringing the support beams crashing down so that you can jump to its back hundreds of feet from the ground. A colossi so enormous, his one hand holds you in its palm like a tiny bug, grasping at its back as you thrust your sword into its vitals.

The scale of the colossi is awesome.

"It is a game of tremendous emotion, of sadness and exhilaration, tragedy and wonder."

Every colossi has its weak point, which must be reached by perilous platforming as the creature moves its powerful form to shake you. Before you can find a point of attachment to climb its back, the creature must be lulled into a compromising position by some thrilling, creative approach, from causing debilitating damage to breaking armor points to irritation by bow-and-arrow shots.

This can be frustrating at times, for a number of reasons that come down to camera quirks, clunky movements, a confusion of direction. There is an ambition and scope to Shadow of the Colossus that has never been attempted, and the PS2, combined with a shaky reach by the gamemakers, can strain to fully tighten the threads to such an artistic tapestry. When the game leaves you wanting, it turns right around and overflows with its next compelling moment. Like ICO before it, Shadow of the Colossus exists in a different place. It's a game you ponder long after the experience has ended. Brady Fiechter

Shadow of the Colossus — **9.0** Score

PlayStation 2

- The way the colossi animate, the way they contain presence is evocative
- Hardware holds the game down

Developer: SCEI **Publisher:** SCEA
Online: None **Available:** October

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The Warriors

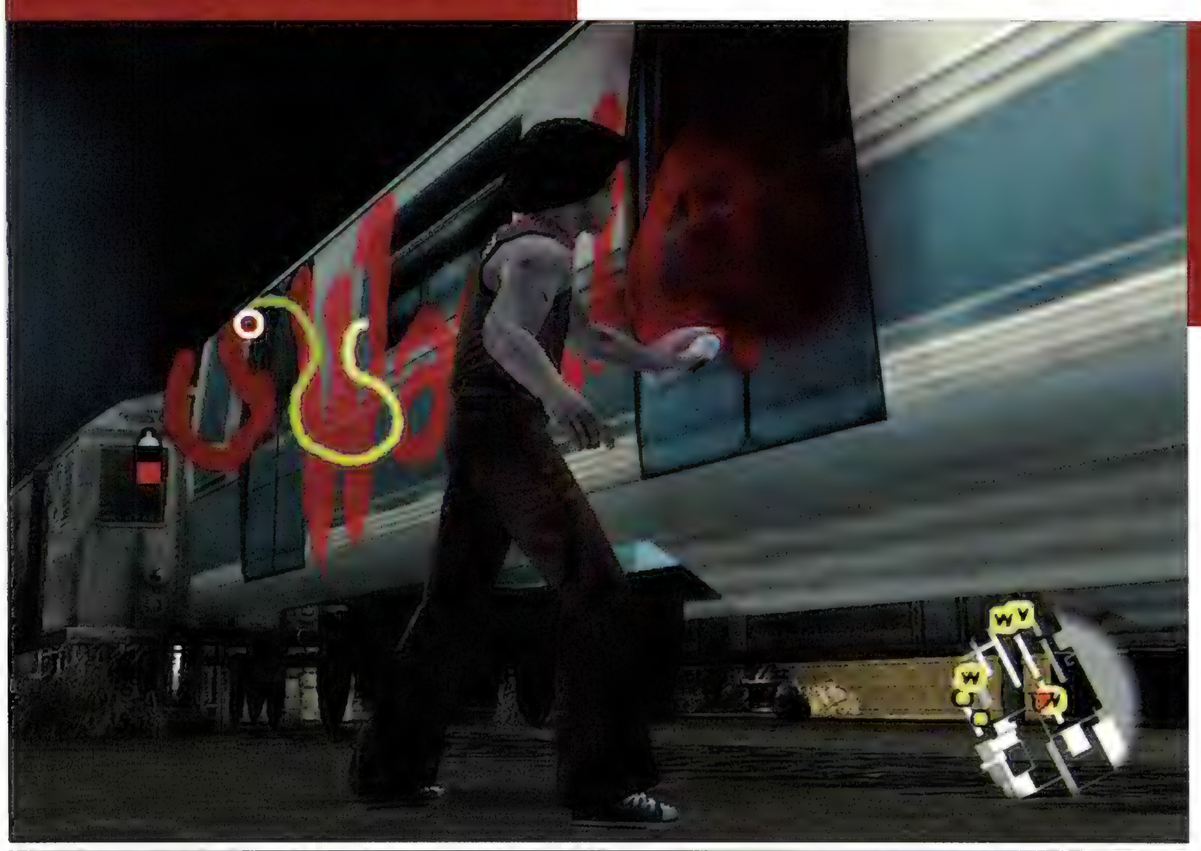
Warriors come out to play. Bloodily.

For every man, woman, and child under the sun who has yearned to bounce a brick off the skull of a mime, Rockstar has generously provided The Warriors. Brutally stark and unflinchingly violent, Warriors does not so much cross the line as it does pick up it and move it about 15 feet into previously untouchable territory. Yet its violence remains very much in context and, more to the point, is deftly handled, with the final product heralding something entirely new for Rockstar Games.

A homage to both the 1979 Walter Hill cult-classic film and beat-'em-ups such as Final Fight and Double Dragon, Warriors is set amid a New York City beset by gang warfare. As the titular Warriors, players take to the streets to carve out an empire among the boarded-up storefronts and frightened citizenry. Their primary weapons are intimidation and the clenched fist. Their mission requires them to rob and mug, to take from the weak to give to the dealers. To keep their credibility intact, they must spraypaint the walls and stomp the hell out of anything that moves. These Warriors are, as singer Kim Wilde once noted, the kids in America. And they are mad as hell.

Cinematic and immersive, Warriors succeeds because it wholly engrosses players. Its New York becomes the most violent playground on Earth with turf to be divided, rumbles fought, and brutal challenges won or lost. A combination of splendid art direction, game structure, and storyline combine to make this possible. It all works, almost seamlessly, to bring Hill's vision to consoles.

Brawlers live and die based on the strength of their fighting, and Warriors thrives on it. Two gameplay buttons are used to issue light and heavy attacks, and a third button handles grapples. From this



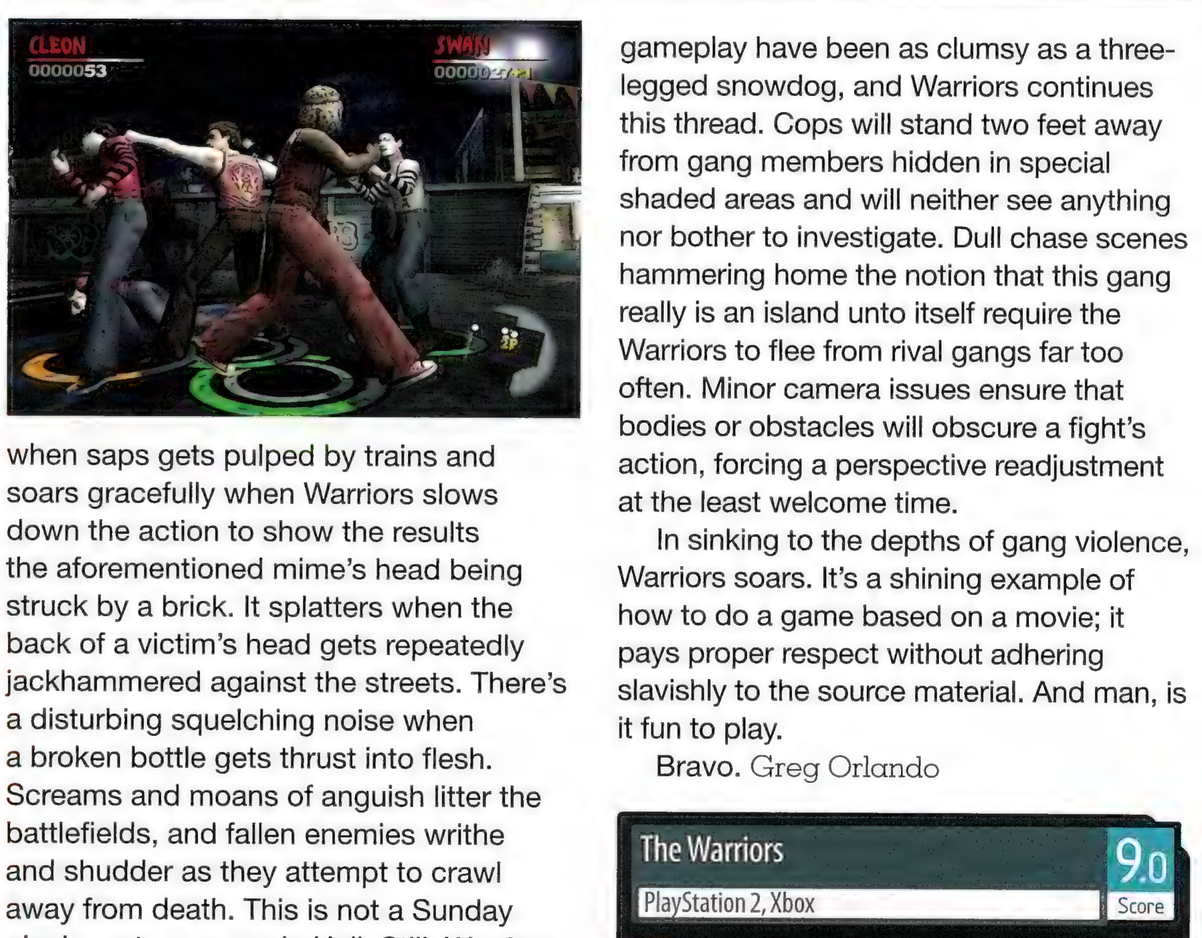
"Cinematic and immersive, Warriors succeeds because it wholly engrosses players."

basic framework, the game allows for a diversity of moves and defenses. Two- and three-button taps create punch and kick combinations. Once properly thrown, tackled, or smashed to the floor, enemies can be mounted and duly punished. The game includes a wealth of weapons to pick up in the environments: planks, garbage cans, bottles, bricks. Other implements of destruction such as shivs, cleavers, bats, and brass knuckles can be won, bought, taken from foes, or stolen from stores. Context-based moves provide additional depth; A Warrior can, say, grab an enemy and then decorate a nearby wall with an oval-shaped crimson stain where the fool's head was slammed.

It's not daunting, this control scheme. Players of all skill sets will be able to quickly get the hang of fighting and in minutes the brawling becomes almost second nature, with no real need to worry about which button does what or fretting over the prospect of pulling off a complex series of button presses to perform a special move, It does this without sacrificing depth or dumbing things down; although the game allows button mashers to progress and perhaps even prosper, it rewards the skilled player in subtle ways. Offensive is ever emphasized, but blocks and counters can quickly turn the tide of a streetfight. Employing combinations and a wide range of moves allows for faster replenishment of a Warrior's rage meter that can be activated to allow for more potent attacks. Tandem moves provide flash and pain, and the game punctuates a lot of its special attacks with brief slow-motion segments showing, in great detail, the strike and the resultant blood spray from the victim.

Combat requires players to wade through groups of foes, a sea of arms, elbows, knees, and fists. Gang warfare means a frenzy of bodies, and the possibility for characters to be flanked, surrounded, and quickly beaten to a pulp. Fights are tense and anxious affairs where confusion reigns, and there's a wonderful sense of adrenaline-churning danger to be had.

The storyline, which begins before the events of the Warriors film, builds the tension with each new mission, leading characters up to an apocalyptic meeting in The Bronx. Warriors begins every new mission by introducing the setting and by counting down to the meeting and the message is very clear—there is no escape



from destiny. Missions explaining the gang's origins help flesh out the picture, and Rockstar sees fit to include some of its best gameplay here. In one of these optional missions, two would-be Warrior recruits must compete against a series of gangs in a king of the hill-style challenge to prove their worthiness. It's silly, sure, but it's also remarkably fun.

All this plays out among a series of spectacularly muted game worlds. Hill's vision of New York is dark and muddy, with browns and grays painting the town. Flashes of color come from gang-decorated walls and facades hint that once upon a time, these places may have been worth visiting. Coney Island emerges, alternately, as a fine place to get beaten up in or be depressed by. This is because Rockstar did its homework—Coney Island was once a pleasure kingdom that degenerated into a sewer that further devolved into a s---hole. Even the landmarks, the brilliantly lit Wonder Wheel with its rocking and sliding cars and the world-famous Cyclone rollercoaster (both liberally featured here), do nothing to mute the bad vibes.

With all the elements in place, Rockstar ratchets up the violence. Blood sprays everywhere. It erupts when saps gets pulped by trains and soars gracefully when Warriors slows down the action to show the results the aforementioned mime's head being struck by a brick. It splatters when the back of a victim's head gets repeatedly jackhammered against the streets. There's a disturbing squelching noise when a broken bottle gets thrust into flesh. Screams and moans of anguish litter the battlefields, and fallen enemies writhe and shudder as they attempt to crawl away from death. This is not a Sunday picnic, not even one in Hell. Still, Warriors perfectly captures the desperation and danger involved with street fighting, and does so without the tiniest bit of sugarcoating.

Only a few small blemishes mar Warriors. Rockstar does brutality exceedingly well. To date, its attempts at stealth-based gameplay have been as clumsy as a three-legged snowdog, and Warriors continues this thread. Cops will stand two feet away from gang members hidden in special shaded areas and will neither see anything nor bother to investigate. Dull chase scenes hammering home the notion that this gang really is an island unto itself require the Warriors to flee from rival gangs far too often. Minor camera issues ensure that bodies or obstacles will obscure a fight's action, forcing a perspective readjustment at the least welcome time.

In sinking to the depths of gang violence, Warriors soars. It's a shining example of how to do a game based on a movie; it pays proper respect without adhering slavishly to the source material. And man, is it fun to play.

Bravo. Greg Orlando

The Warriors — 9.0 Score

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Excellent fighting and brawling; great unlockable modes; gratuitously violent toward mimes and clowns

Dull missions interspersed with the good ones; occasional problems disengaging from combat; Andy Gibb music

Developer: Rockstar Toronto **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
Online: None **Available:** October

Castlevania

Curse of Darkness

Cue the creatures, start the symphony...The 3D Castlevania we've waited for has finally arrived

Advancing through the third installment of Castlevania in 3D, it's undeniable how proficient the core CV team (Igarashi, Kojima, and Yamane) have become at the art of monster-disposal-based adventure gaming. Not because the game is bursting with innovation, but because it's not. Once again they have been able to take one of the most rudimentary concepts in gaming, born of the 8-bit era, and by sheer technique in the areas of world and creature design, control and music, create something utterly mesmerizing. In every area Lament failed Curse's subtle differences make it excel.

So skilled are Iga and Co. at capturing the very essence of their simple contrivance that it's all one can do to pause for nourishment and bathroom breaks; which is certainly an altogether more difficult task working in 3D. In 2D, Castlevania draws from a much deeper goblet, incorporating grappling, assorted platforming, more focused battles, and Metroid style level progression, but in 3D, everything pretty much revolves around combat, ambience, and story; three areas where Curse literally beams.

A tale of two Devil Forgemasters: Hector, whose betrayal of Dracula left him open for the Belmonts' fatal blow, and Isaac, his humiliated equal now bent on making him pay dearly. Along the way Hector will meet minions within Vallachia on either side of the conflict (including Trevor Belmont looking all set for his PS3 debut) but the mission, as in all Castlevanias, is crystal clear: Kill the source and you kill the curse...Europe is dying; time to save the day.

Just as the condiments define the burger (meat and bread anyone?) the tools of the demon-hunting trade define Curse. But you can forget dashing lanterns to gather hearts for throwing assorted weapons. Hearts are gobbled up by Castlevania's answer to Tamagochi called Innocent Devils, and after Curse I can't imagine a Castlevania without them. Essentially pet monsters you forge and evolve throughout the game, they lend shield, power, flight, healing, and special abilities that can turn the tide in any battle, not to mention how great they look and how fun to mature. The other

Remember those first screens? Here's where this boss really lives and breathes…fire!

great device in Curse is "combining" using found elements to continually upgrade your weapons and armor. No more saving up for that pricey mace. Found elements throughout the game strengthen armor, spear, mallet, club, sword, and fist. And what you don't need you can sell just in case you need a potion or two…and you will.

The creatures in Curse—possibly the best in terms of both design and form the series has ever seen—are the stuff of 8-and 16-bit dreams; each and every one pattern-based, forcing the player to use strategy at every turn. Blatant hacking and slashing is not an option.

Above all however, what struck me most about Curse was how much it felt like the old school Simon's Quest-era Castlevania in 3D, traversing miles of country beyond the confines of the castle into the forest, surrounding mountainside, and grounds. Vallachia is absolutely enormous; the castle a gigantic network of towering gothic corridors and chambers reaching down into the bowels of the earth and out to the surrounding countryside.

Above all, Iga and Co. know where Castlevania fans' buttons lie and exactly how and when to press them, which is why they can continue to layer subtle details over the basic design and score hit after hit; something few brands this long in the tooth could ever dream of getting away with. Behind all the gameplay…all the code, and all those wonderful Castlevania bosses, two things really drive this franchise; the music, which is always an extension of itself, and the simple art of set dressing: All they do is sit there but any Castlevania fan knows they're like old friends. Candelabra, skulls, old bones, flickering wax candles, stained glass, stacks of old tomes, torches, giant pillars of stone, long flowing red drapes, ornate iron fences, gothic fountains, empty cathedrals, marble floors…there's nothing subtle about it. This is our monster movie.

"Above all, Iga and Co. know where Castlevania fans' buttons lie and exactly how and when to press them..."

Dracula didn't just live here; he decorated the place. The amazing creatures are what make the game live, but they're nothing without Castlevania gothic.

Between the Xbox and PS2, the anti-aliasing of course makes a huge difference and the Xbox game is pretty much load free (although the PS2 doesn't load too badly) but texture- and model-wise, they're identical, although the added resolution makes everything look that much better on Xbox as you can see in these lovely screen captures. Crossing console lines bodes well for the future of the series; here's to Iga and company sticking to their guns (whips, whatever) for another 20 years. Dave Halverson

Castlevania: Curse of Darkness — **9.0** Score

Xbox, PlayStation 2

+ Gorgeous, ever-evolving, and absolutely impossible to put down. Epic bosses and beautiful cinemas.

− Hector's walk needs work; he has a tendency to slip off targets in mid-combo (needs a lock-on) and I wish he had Alucard's grace.

Developer: Konami **Publisher:** Konami
Online: None **Available:** October

Far Cry Instincts

A fantastic closing to the first-person empire on Xbox

Separating one first-person shooter from the next on Xbox has mostly come down to quality of implementation over richness of fresh ideas, but Far Cry: Instincts manages to be that rare achievement that feels nicely removed from the pack. It's an extension of last year's acclaimed PC title, unplayed by me, but now I see what all the fuss was about.

Moving around a brisk, workable story involving mercenaries and a missing journalist, the game places you in the role of Jack Carver, an unhinged tough guy whose basic motives are survival. And surviving is more than the effective strength of your typical assortments of firearms.

Jack's a bit more beast than human, possessing feral abilities that enhance sight, sound, and strength, all growing in use and becoming more honed as the mission deepens. Stealthier kills come into play as you begin to track the enemy's scent, slicing them from behind with a handy hunting knife, rushing them with a nasty animal-like swipe that sends them flying. Night vision comes into play, and tracking an enemy to lay a trap is even possible. The game doesn't go as far as you might hope with the enemy intelligence and creative gameplay structure, but the more open play does reach an excellent level of engagement.

High praise goes to the fantastic island setting, which takes the Xbox to its perceived limits and plays off a all sorts of slick visual tricks and stirring designs. Foliage just never looks very good in games, but here the dense growth is encompassing and impressively organic. That you actually move around and interact with so much of what you're seeing maintains a compellingly convincing world. The excellent sound effects and environmental noises complete the mood.

Far Cry: Instincts takes all this online, of course, offering the basics of deathmatch, steal the flag type scenarios, team play and the like. The map editor is fairly robust, a standout that true fans of the game will love sinking their teeth into. If this is the last of its kind on Xbox, Far Cry: Instincts is a great way to go out. Brady Fiechter

Far Cry: Instincts **8.5** Score

Xbox

So pretty... the jungle setting pulls you right in

The enemy AI is spotty

Developer: Ubisoft Montreal **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Online: 16-player **Available:** September

"High praise goes to the fantastic island setting, which takes the Xbox to its perceived limits..."

From effects to details to lighting, the game looks spectacular.

CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

Try not to crash, bandicoot

"...massive action constructs packed with action puzzles, cause and effect mayhem..."

Cause and effect vignettes liven up each themed world.

Cart racing—a.k.a. the place where brands go to either die or transition—is a fairly simple formula where three core elements—course design, handling nuances, and power ups—converge for either big fun, as in Mario Kart or Diddy Kong Racing, or token bile such as Antz Extreme Racing or Super Bombad Racing (talk about your bad omens; bomb and bad right in the title). How well a given developer can balance these core elements accounts for pretty much the whole enchilada when it comes to zipping around in tiny carts firing assorted projectiles at your fellow racers. We all know the drill: There are few things worse than speeding toward the finish line after 3 laps of meticulous power sliding and weapons dispersal only to have a homing missile rammed up your arse at the last second. It's almost as annoying as being so far out in the lead that you feel like you need to slow down to have any fun. But even in the case Radical got everything right, does the world really need another current-gen cart racer? I imagine Radical asked themselves that very question when they got the nod to take over the Crash franchise…beginning with the series' second cart racer. "Okay people we're making…a cart racer; lets have some ideas" How they came up with a theme park run by a maniacal gear head hosting a tournament emceed by a pair of chickens I do not know, but it's certainly a great place to start. What really makes CTTR click however is the insane amalgam of gameplay on tap and 'clashing', the best thing to happen to cart racing since the shoulder tap power slide. By fusing together with the closest competitor you can leave the driving to say Nina Cortex (toon gothic, gotta love her) while you man the turret until the ammo runs dry. When and how long to clash is the essential ingredient in the racing dynamic along with all of the usual cart racing accoutrements, all of which are in here and done right. Von Clutch's twisted amusement park also serves as a massive interactive hub from which character specific tasks are doled out to unlock cars, racers, and upgrades linked to the actual themed worlds themselves, which amount to massive action constructs packed with action puzzles, cause and effect mayhem, interactive lunacy, and a variety of race types including stunt tracks, battle arenas, and 4-5 different modes per course that run the gamut of vehicular mayhem. The end result is a massive funtopia where the Crash universe's new found dementia (VU is wise to continue the series' Looney Tunes on crack direction) can run completely amok. The action isn't what you'd call fine-tuned (Crash's controls are a little skatey and the camera jams quite a bit) but as a side order of fun the hubs pack a wallop, adding immeasurably to the overall experience. The old cart racing mold has (finally) been broken…make that shattered. Dave Halverson

Crash Tag Team Racing — **7.5** Score

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PSP, DS

+ Unlike any cart racer you've ever played, loaded with sight gags, humor, and a truly bent (in a great way) soundtrack.

– The action hubs lack polish and the graphics are of average PS2 quality across the board, so no bells or whistles for the GC or Xbox versions.

Developer: Radical Entertainment **Publisher:** VU Games
Online: None **Available:** October

TY IS BACK AND HE'S KICKIN' AUSSIE TAIL!

TY 3 the Tasmanian Tiger™

Night of the Quinkan

Pilot the Gunyip into battle and attack from the air!

Engage in close "rang" combat face-to-face with the Quinkan!

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KROME STUDIOS

EVERYONE 10+

10+

Cartoon Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation 2 XBOX GAMECUBE GAME BOY ADVANCE

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Without Warning

We've been sent to issue all you people here a warning...

Security guard Dave Wilson may well be the world's first brain transplant candidate. At one point in the third-person adventure cum shoot-'em-up Without Warning, Wilson finds himself in a locked room, shooting it out, a desperate last stand against a series of terrorists. He waxes philosophically that someone should restore power, thus allowing him to pass safely through the electronically sealed door penning him in.

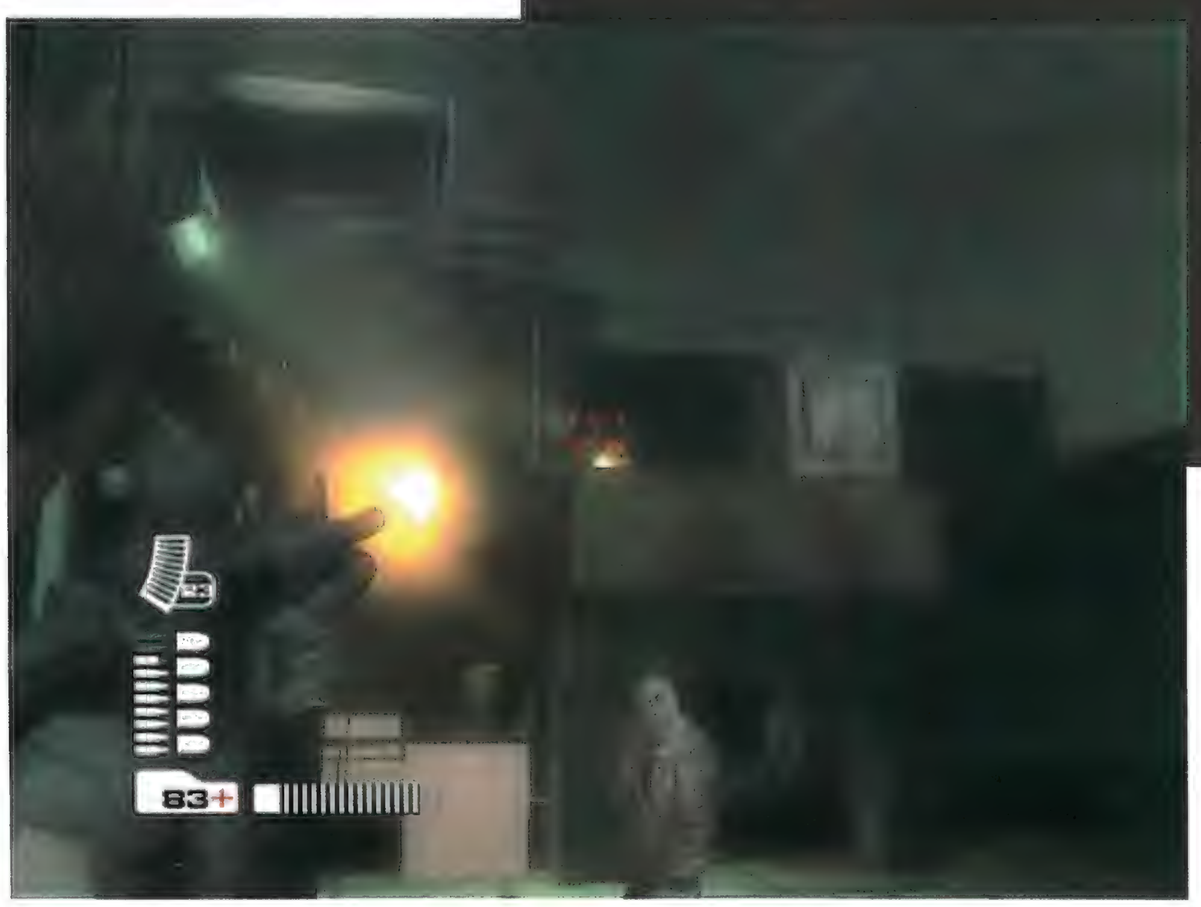
Wilson, it might be noted, is shooting out at the terrorists through a series of large windows. On the first floor. It might also be noted, solely for the sake of belaboring the obvious, that Wilson is an idiot who should stop waiting for power to be restored to doors when he might more easily climb through an oversized and open window.

When idiots attack, the result can only be Without Warning... Terrorists with rocket launchers close to point-blank range before firing so as to kill themselves, their allies, and maybe a special forces operative or two. When they say they're going to execute hostages, these same villains really mean they're going to run out blindly and fire their guns everywhere but at the bound people at their feet.

Testosterone carries Warning. It does not carry it very far, nor very fast. Players take the role of six different characters, four with an aggressive bent and two who are more inclined to run than fight. The emphasis has been clearly placed on shooting the bad guys and the explosive barrels they love to stand near. Most missions require copious amounts of bloodshed before they can be completed, and it's easy enough to use a lock-on feature to compensate for the spastic, jittery control scheme that makes targeting an impressive challenge.

In combat, enemies do take cover, but will stay behind boxes even when flanked and fired upon. Combat doesn't really require much in the way of strategy,

Kinda like Duck Hunt... only not.



"Testosterone carries Warning. It does not carry it very far, nor very fast."

although later levels provide an increased terrorist presence to allow for the possibility of getting hit from multiple directions. Run-and-gun tactics can be used throughout with little ill-effect and Warning trods across no new ground in the action-shooter genre. It does provide a neat effect where the screen flashes red and shakes accordingly enough to disorient a player when a character gets hit, but this is faint praise indeed.

Minigames break up the action, with minimal memory skills and a hearty appreciation for the obvious being the prerequisites for beating. One lockpicking challenge demands players identify the length of tumblers and then push them up accordingly. This is not brain surgery. It is not even mopping the floors after a particularly gruesome brain surgery. Warning gleefully throws these puzzles up time and again, and only changes its tack when it's time to have some hapless character schlep from A to B looking for a keycard.

A branching and converging storyline weaves the individual perspectives together. Characters will revisit areas others have already traveled and perform actions to aid their comrades. It's one of the game's commandos who turns on the juice to free Wilson from his locked-door prison, and the coming together of the continuity makes for some interesting happenings. It's also entirely too little too late, given Warning's basic disregard for man as the thinking animal. Greg Orlando

Without Warning

4.0 Score

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Lots of firefights

Dumb. Also: stupid and lackwitted.

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom
Online: None **Available:** November

The Suffering
Ties That Bind

Drug addicts and serial killers... all in a day's work for our man Torque

Enemies go down in big chunks...

The Suffering: Ties That Bind is as much brutal, ceaseless action as it is psychological horror, as much story-driven dread as it is explicit doom and gloom. It mostly succeeds on all levels, mining for more depth than the first game while getting a little caught up in its own misplaced ambitions. I gravitate towards this type of game and Ties That Bind is a good one.

Once again, you play through the first- and third-person eyes of Torque, a convicted murderer who may or may not have been responsible for the death of his wife and son. He seems to be a decent man at heart, yet a man who has made some regretful mistakes in his life, and the price he pays is slowly revealed as the story unfolds. It's involving, the way you start to see Torque's psyche exposed, the way his haunted past takes shape in the game's world. The windup is more satisfying than the payoff, hints of a more resonant tale are left to crumble in missed opportunities, but through the violence and gore is a connection to the character that can leave a mark.

The creatures Torque encounters are certainly a highlight, revealed as manifestations of urban horrors and criminal brutalities. They don't move as frighteningly as they look on first impression, but that's not to say the action doesn't keep us charged. The downfall comes when too much is going at once, leaving the simplistic combat to grind on your patience where a more involved mode of character interaction would have helped.

The morality system returns from the first game, going further in its pursuit to alter the course of the game and our choice of personal involvement. I can see where the developers were going with it, and I like the idea that it affects the way Torque transforms into his beast form, but the path isn't sharply defined; it's more of a workable idea than an effective tool that leaves a lasting impression.

Dreadfully fictionalized slums of Baltimore are effectively envisioned in Ties That Bind. It's a place you're not surprised to see inhabited by villains who skate on knives attached to their feet and dirty needles stuck in their flesh. When it all comes off slightly undercooked, it's not for lack of strong ingredients. The Suffering: Ties That Bind is a satisfying sequel.

Brady Fiechter

The Suffering: Ties That Bind — **8.0** Score

PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Good action, strong sense of character, looks good

Can try too hard to shock, just comes off forced

Developer: Surreal Software **Publisher:** Midway
Online: None **Available:** September

"...as much story-driven dread as it is explicit doom and gloom."

Jak X
Combat Racing

Can you even call this a kart racer? Naughty Dog shakes up the genre

Jak and his obnoxiously abrasive sidekick Daxter have made a laudable decision: trade in the adventures of saving the world on foot for the fresh thrills of saving the world while racing buggies. Or rather, recklessly careening buggies through wildly treacherous courses while blasting the competition off the track with high-powered weapons. Jak X: Combat Racing is the best thing to happen to the genre on PS2. In fact, it's pretty much its own unique brand of kart racing.

So the music's flat, the character banter needs to be livened up, the breaks for an annoyingly strapped-on story are a waste of resources. The game excels in too many ways to stall from the dead weight.

A variety of combat fields is a big part of the appeal. Dominating the competitions are four major modes of play: the traditional straight-forward race to the finish line; arena deathmatch, which takes on a growing complexity as you climb the class ladder; open field search and destroy, dominated by collection runs; and the simple but deceptively effective destroyer runs, where you drive head on into traffic, taking out as many drone vehicles as possible, gaining point multipliers for every lap finished. Grand Prixs come into play to provide trips to the next class, and, as in all the various competitions, there are tons of wrinkles thrown into each type of playing field that gives the game an unprecedented level of variety. Everyone will come away with their favorite types of racing modes, but even when you're locked into the weakest of the competitions, the scope of it all really does complete the experience.

Naughty Dog has remained faithful to the durable touches veterans will keen in on, like the cheap kills, beneficial timing starts and the delightfully maddening, incessant position changes that play out to the climactic end. The big hook to the racers is the sophisticated physics model, which widely differentiates each modified machine and adds a growing gameplay engagement as the speeds and tracks intensify. Jak X doesn't show its true form til you climb into the more advanced classes, finding satisfying racing lines and new modes of strategy. Take all this online for one of the more newly fun experiences for the modern console, and you've got one evolved combat racer indeed.

Brady Fiechter

Jak X: Combat Racing — **9.0** Score

PlayStation 2

What's not to like about a new breed of kart racing?

Lacks that extra color to match up with Mario Kart

Developer: Naughty Dog **Publisher:** Sony
Online: 6-player **Available:** October

Few do real-time cinemas like Naughty Dog.

"Jak X: Combat Racing is the best thing to happen to the genre on PS2."

DESTINY HAS CHOSEN ITS MESSENGER

"Sniper Elite™ takes combat to the next level."
-IGN

"9 out of 10"
- PSM

ONE BULLET CAN CHANGE HISTORY

SNIPER ELITE™

TENSE MULTIPLAYER SNIPER BATTLES.

REALISTIC SNIPING WITH ADJUSTMENTS FOR GRAVITY, WIND, HEART RATE AND MORE.

28 SINGLE PLAYER AND CO-OPERATIVE MISSIONS.

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M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

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The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA

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PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

Review Gallery

Battalion Wars

GameCube

Developer: Kuju **Publisher:** Nintendo **Online:** None **Available:** September

9.0 Score

Not only is Advanced Wars Dual Strike one of the very best games of the year but now it's being joined by the quintessential military action/RTS for GC. Commanding all manner of troops like a real-time Cannon Fodder, and piloting assorted vehicles has never been even close to this much fun, or this beautifully executed. It's a background turner, but the character design and animation are absolutely brilliant as is the flow of the game and integrated (decidedly comic book) story, taking us from one war (the Western front vs. the Tundran territories) to the next as the two must band together to stop the maniacal Kaiser Vlad and his gas breathing Xylvanian Army. Now this is the kind of war I can get behind. Dave Halverson

"...the character design and animation are absolutely brilliant"

Wallace and Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Frontier Developments

Publisher: Konami

Online: None

Available: September

7.0 Score

Fans of this claymation series will be overjoyed at this fun little foray into the world of that wacky inventor Wallace and his dog Gromit. You'll also be able to play as Hutch, one of Gromit's bunny buddies. You'll only get to control Hutch at night, though; switching day and night by activating sundials is imperative to solving the mystery of the were-rabbits. Using a wide (and weird) variety of weapons like the Bun-Gun, Bolt Cutters, and a Lady Were-Rabbit Decoy (how's that for creative?) the threesome must rid their town of evil were-rabbits that terrorize the place when the sun goes down. A delightful movie game that's sure to satisfy. Ashley Esqueda

Karaoke Revolution Party

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Developer: Konami

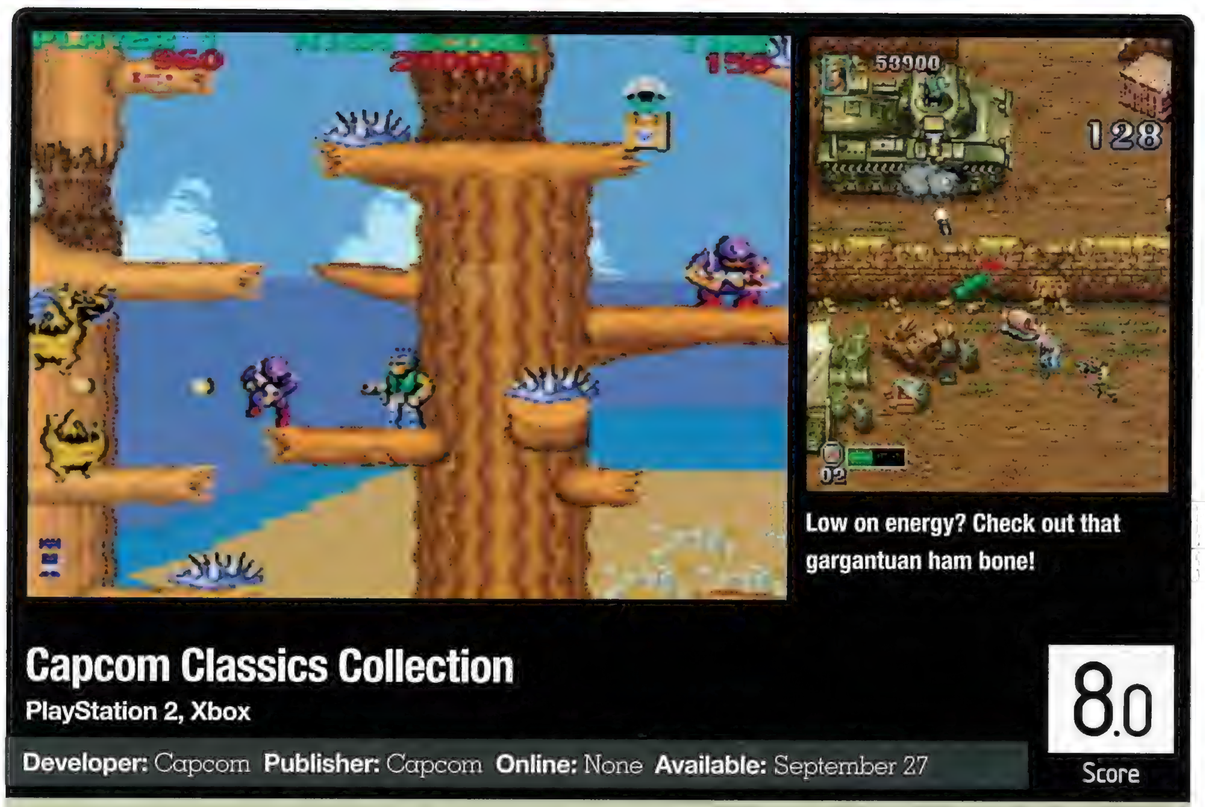
Publisher: Konami

Online: Downloadable songs

Available: November

7.5 Score

If you're tired of singing in the shower and want to move your warbling into the living room, Karaoke Revolution Party's here to help gain the attention of the opposite sex. Adding to the kitschy playlist is a new mode that gets you off your tookus and onto a dance mat. If singing in tune wasn't hard enough, Konami's plopped in simultaneous dancing, making you bust a move while you belt out Beyonce. With downloadable songs, mini-games that are as fun as they are totally weird, and really cool customizable avatars with EyeToy, we only have one question: Are you ready to rock? Ashley Esqueda



Low on energy? Check out that gargantuan ham bone!

Capcom Classics Collection

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Online:** None **Available:** September 27

8.0 Score

Arcade collections come and go, most of them filled with far too many once fond but now painful memories of how shite we had it growing up. Not so with Capcom CC. Sure there are a few painful reminders in here…This is the Street Fighter that started it all? But hey, Ghost 'n' Goblins, Ghouls 'n' Ghosts and Super Ghouls 'n' Ghosts on one disc? That's just too much love for you and me. Add Mercs, Forgotten Worlds, Final Fight, 1943, Kai and Bionic Commando and you've got yourself some choice old school. Three things missing though: Strider, Willow and NES Bionic Commando. I know it's not "arcade" but it smokes the arcade version. Still…no Strider? C'mon! Dave Halverson

"Ghost 'n' Goblins, Ghouls 'n' Ghosts and Super Ghouls 'n' Ghosts on one disc? That's just too much love for you and me."

SSX on Tour

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PSP

Developer: EA Canada **Publisher:** EA Sports Big **Online:** None **Available:** October

8.0 Score

Snow Miser, Mr. White Christmas himself, is duly pleased. The fourth iteration of Electronic Arts' extreme snowboarding series SSX comes with 12 new tracks to plummet down and trick off of, a series of "Shred" races against competitors, and new create-a-character options within the game's World Tour mode. For this go-round, skiing has been added, but this seems largely cosmetic. It's hard to note how, exactly, the board handles differently than the blades during gameplay. No matter; as always, the grinding is good, the tricks are easy enough for a schlub to pull off, and Electronic Arts does a fine job of fleshing everything out with a series of animated pencil line-drawings that jackhammer home the game's exceedingly cool style. Greg Orlando

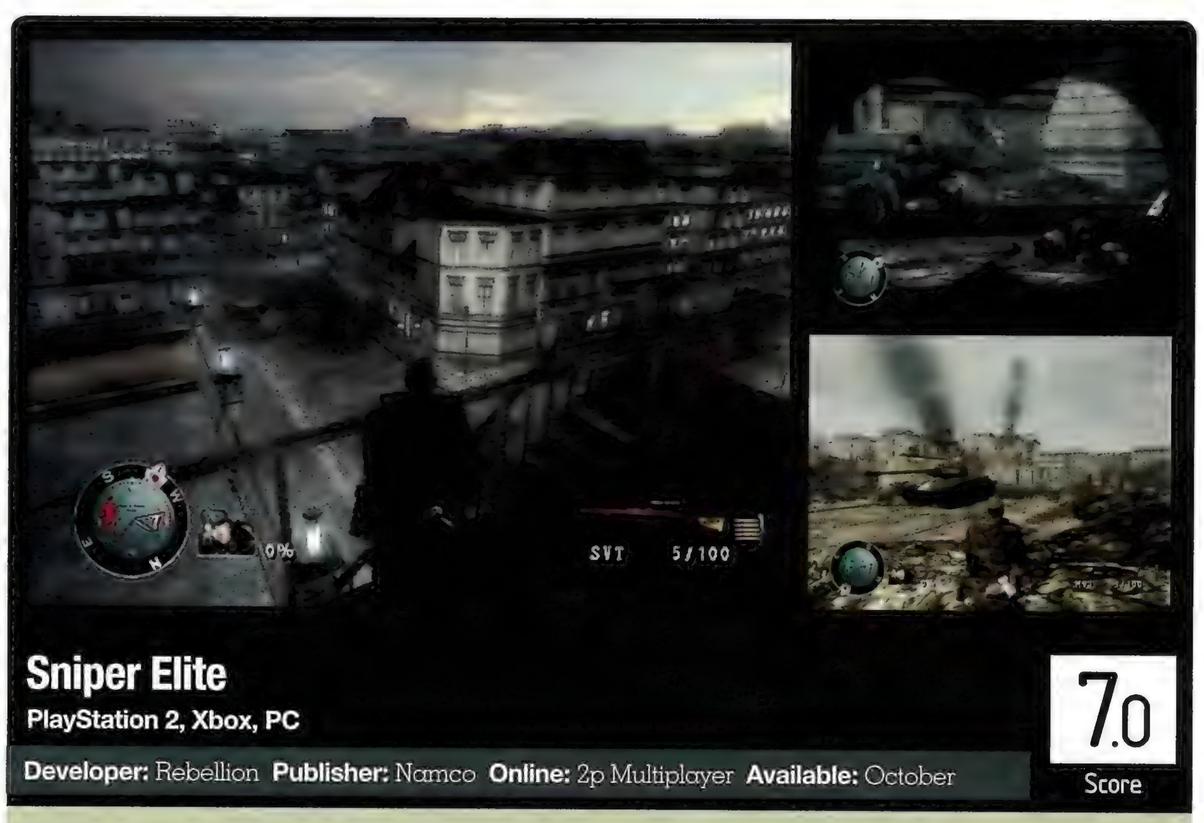
Chicken Little

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, PC

Dev: Avalanche Software **Pub:** Buena Vista Games **Online:** None **Available:**

8.5 Score

The sky is falling! Actually, Chicken Little's already been through that—now he has to prove to his father (and everyone else) that he's worth his weight in feathers. Teaming up with Chicken Little's motley crew of friends, they set out on a platforming adventure fans of the genre won't soon forget. Each member of the group gets play time, and each have their own unique ability to add to the depth. In addition to the great visuals, many of the actors from the film provided voiceover for this movie game, really selling the experience for people that have seen the film. Who knew kicking arse with a chicken (wielding a yo-yo, no less) could be so super-cool? Ashley Esqueda



Sniper Elite

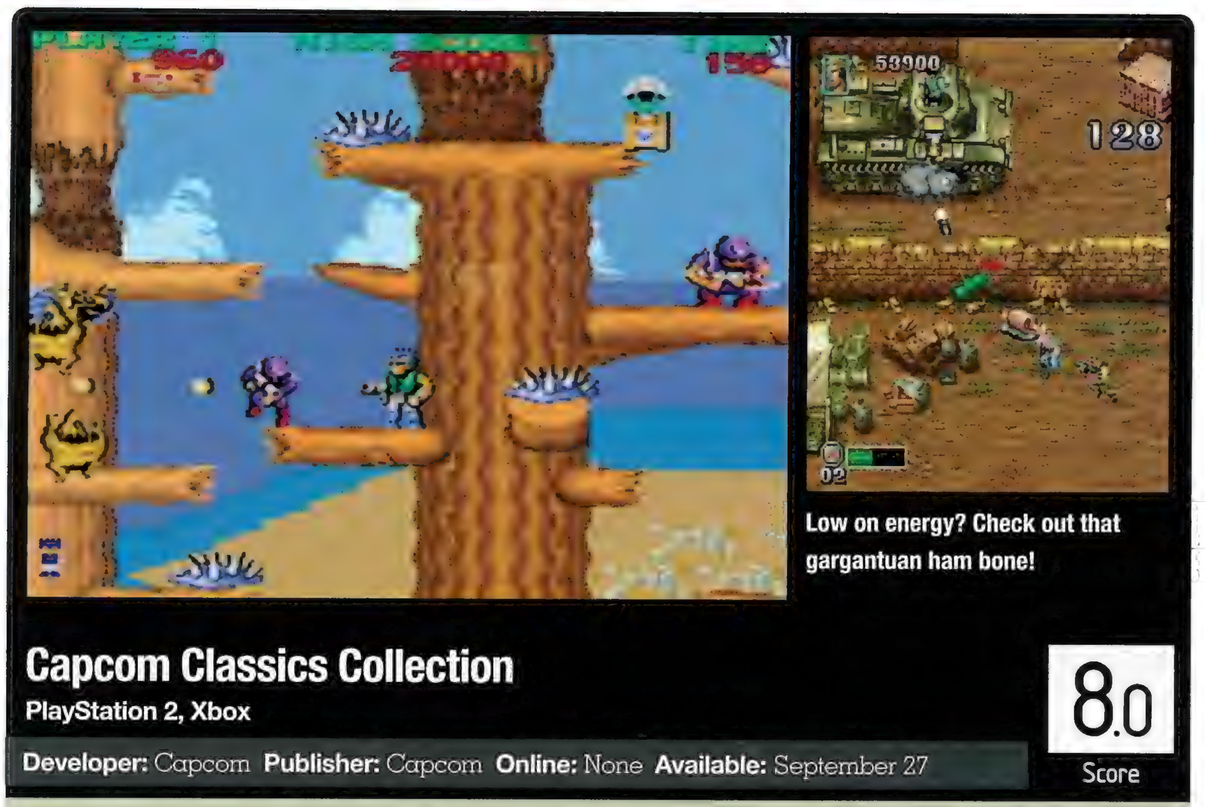
PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Developer: Rebellion **Publisher:** Namco **Online:** 2p Multiplayer **Available:** October

7.0 Score

There are two ways to learn the sniper's deadly art. The second method, approved by Namco in its first and third-person World War II adventure Sniper Elite, is more commonly known as trial-and-error or, alternately: I Like To Stop Bullets With My Face. As a sniper at the ass-end of World War II, players creep around a fairly depressing and wrecked Berlin looking for sweet spots to potshot Soviets from and croak from lead poisoning all too often in the process. Elite excels at creating an atmosphere of paranoia and alienation, however; quick flashes of movement in a rifle's scope or through binoculars oftentimes foreshadow an ignominious death, and players are quickly taught caution amid the rubble and ruin. Greg Orlando

"As a sniper at the ass-end of World War II, players creep around a fairly depressing and wrecked Berlin looking for sweet spots..."



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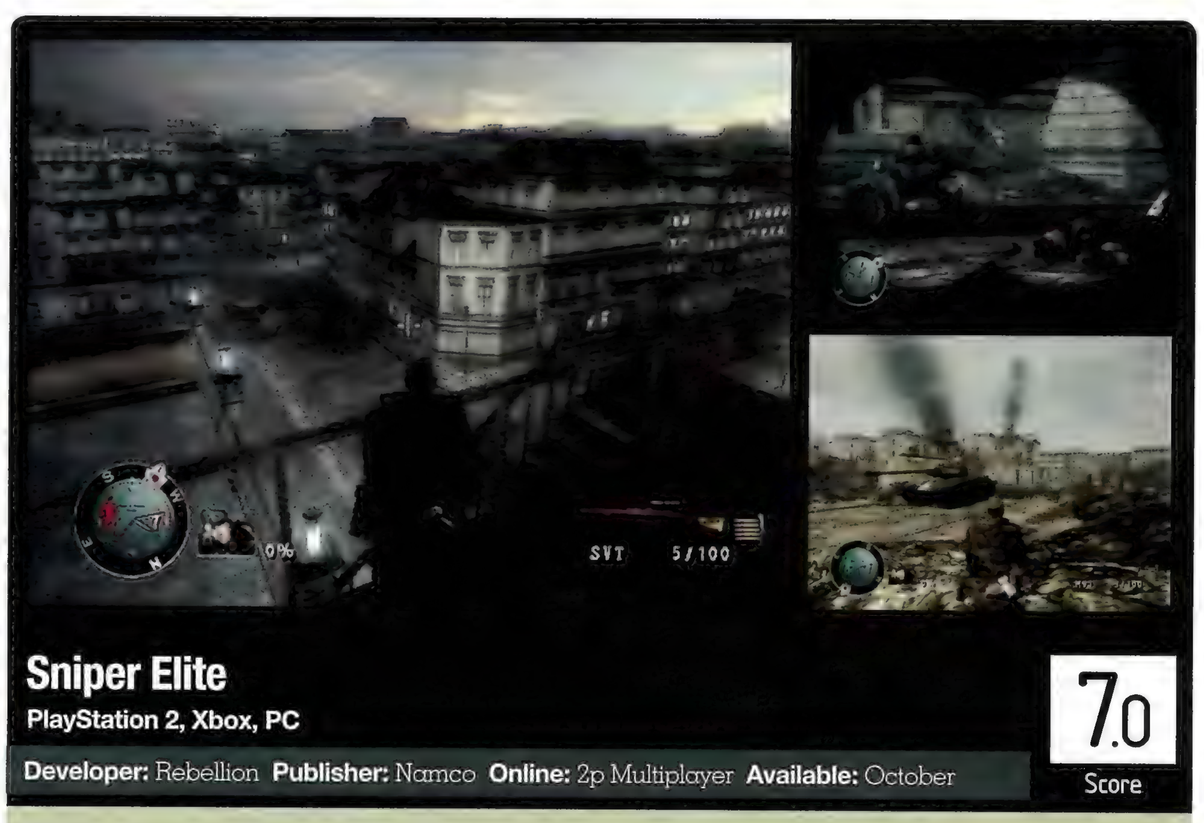

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"As a sniper at the ass-end of World War II, players creep around a fairly depressing and wrecked Berlin looking for sweet spots..."

Blitz: The League

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Midway **Publisher:** Midway **Online:** 2 Player head-to-head **Available:** Oct.

5.5 Score

At some point, perhaps when the soundtrack blares, "I don't give a f---," over and over, or maybe when the game gleefully lingers over scenes of a wide receiver's bones shattering after a particularly hard hit, or when said player twitches and writhes and screams on-screen before being taken off the field for an injection (also lovingly shown during gameplay) that Blitz: The League crosses the thin line between hardcore and tasteless. Although the venerable pigskin franchise receives a much needed reworking here, the results are uneven at best, potholed by excessive load times as well as an over reliance on a new bullet time-esque Clash mode that unbalances play by slowing time and turning a selected character into a superhuman juggernaut for a spell. Greg Orlando

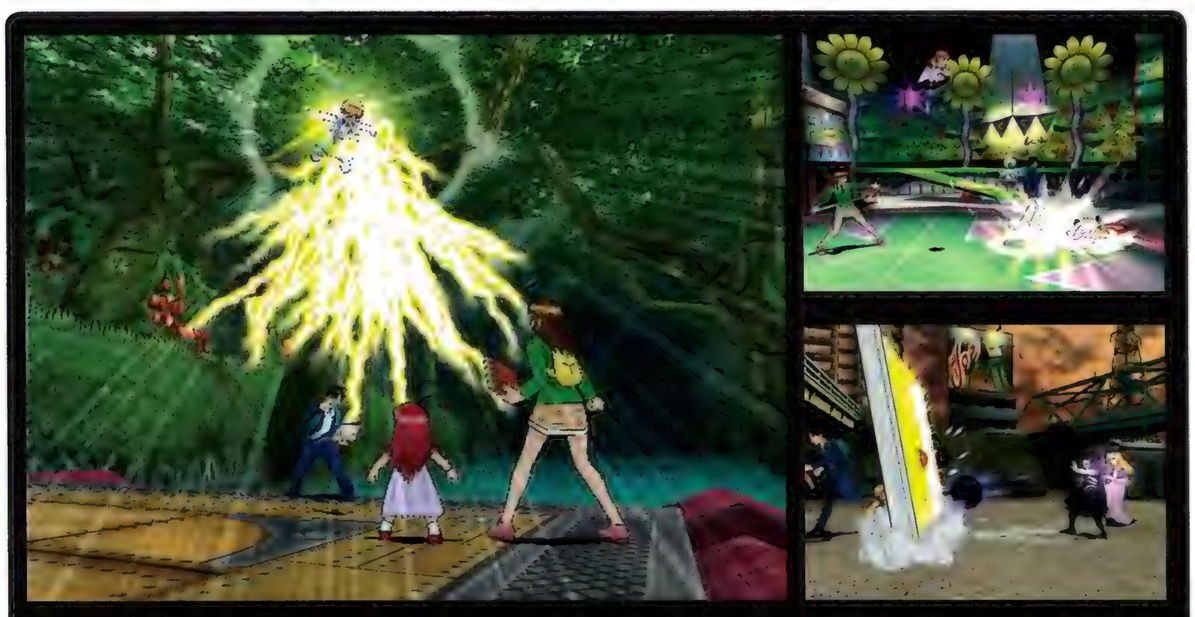
L.A. Rush

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Midway **Publisher:** Midway **Online:** None **Available:** October 10

7.0 Score

...More like Midnight Club Rush with extra shizzle or whatever you want to call this urban bile everyone is spilling into their games. There is apparently no escape; the token thug booshit just continues to pour out like an airborne virus without a cure, infecting everything in its path. It's a shame too because L.A. Rush still retains some of its old school charm via short cuts and jumps even though it's centered around the "lifestyle" of an L.A. street racer (yeah, right). They do a nice job on the city and the competition de jour is tasty stuff, but it's not like we needed a sequel with so many racing games out there along these lines. If you absolutely positively cannot get enough urban racing Rush does it well, but beware, it's pimped to the max. Dave Halverson



Zatch Bell: Mamado Battles

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Eighting **Publisher:** Bandai **Online:** None **Available:** October

7.0 Score

Hang on to your hats... When genius High-Schooler Kiyo begins to slip at school his dad sends him a strange little boy/doll (in a dress no less) to help straighten him up complete with a red tome of spells which when read aloud conjure a freak show like no other...Hmmm, do I smell yet another Bandai anime-based fighting game? Indeed I do and again it's all that and a trip to the fruity farm, especially in story mode where the Mamado World and the real world collide in two on true Shaman King/InuYasha fashion. Crazy supers, intuitive controls, character customization and great visuals abound but the lack of a jump button bugs me; although Kiyo can throw Zatch into the air. Dave Halverson

"Hmmm, do I smell yet another Bandai anime-based fighting game? Indeed I do and again it's all that and a trip to the fruity farm..."

Tak: The Great JuJu Challenge

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Developer: Avalanche **Publisher:** THQ **Online:** None **Available:** September

7.5 Score

What better way to transition Tak from generation to generation than a buddy picture? Once you drag your butt out of the Pupununu pooh-pooh the big bright shining star of co-op racing madness awaits, starring the dim-witted Lok--voiced once again with mad skills by Patrick Warburton (Puddy, The Tick)--and of course Tak. It's the weak and wily meets the dumb and strong as you platform your way across breathtaking jungle locales to win the favor of the Moon JuJu. Expect every trick in the book from mind teasers, to shooting, to all manner of cause end effect platforming along with some of the best co-op gameplay since Dashin' Desperados. Control is still a tad clunky but a super fun game nevertheless. Dave Halverson

Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 3: Night of the Quinkan

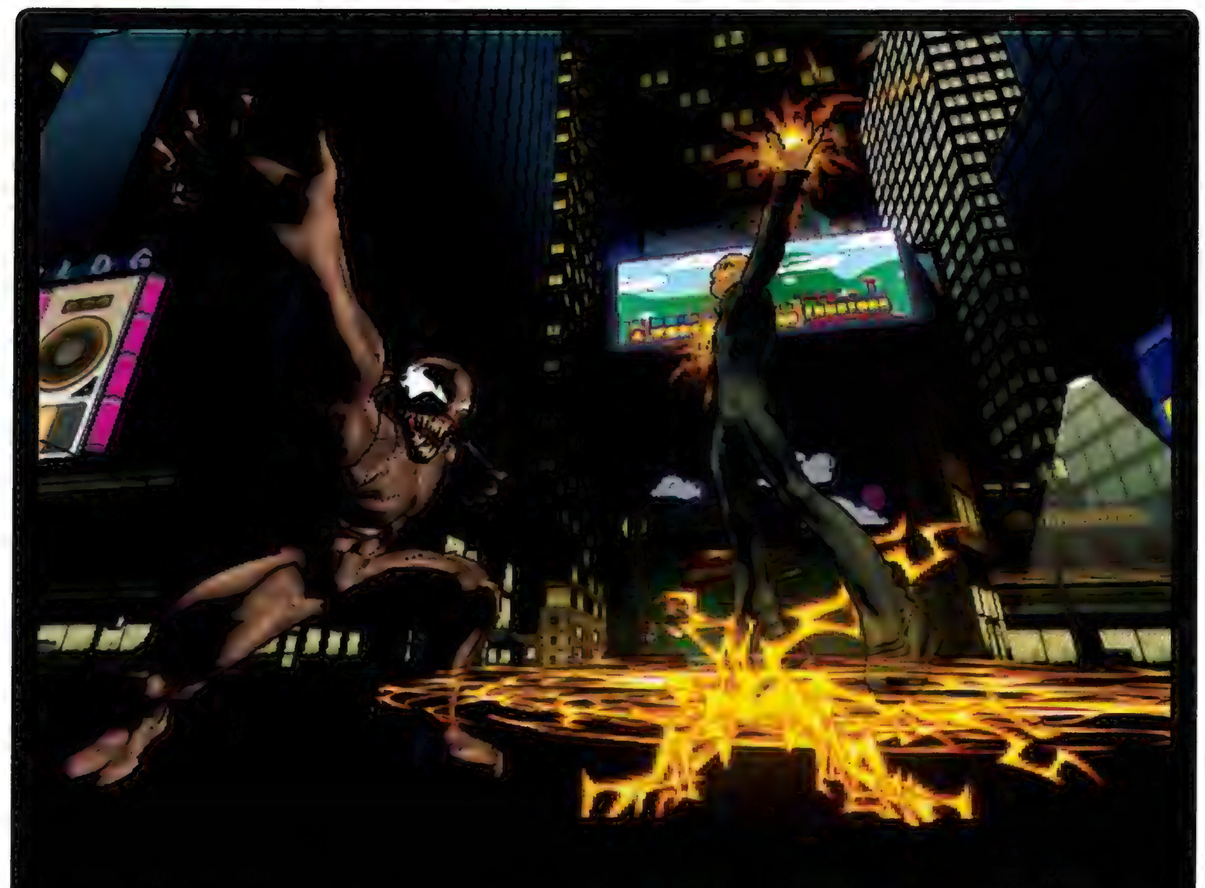
PlayStation 2

Developer: Krome Studios **Publisher:** Activision **Online:** None **Available:** October

7.5 Score

Krome know their young audience and really love their little tiger Ty; two things exceedingly evident in Ty 3, a quality romp that capitalizes on what the first two games did best; incorporating the linear treks from Ty along with a scaled-down and refined version of Ty 2's vast universe. The end result is a highly entertaining mini-epic, tailor made for younger blokes and platform fanatics. Although the original game is still my favorite (as much as I like the Quinkan and added diversity) the first Ty was just fab. Ty 3's good fun though and a fitting farewell to our little buddy, for now. I really hope to see him on next-gen in the not so distant future. Something a bit more aboriginal would be nice too...it's definitely time for Ty to get some edge. Dave Halverson

"...a highly entertaining mini-epic, tailor made for younger blokes..."



Ultimate Spiderman

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Developer: Treyarch **Publisher:** Activision **Online:** None **Available:** September

8.0 Score

If nothing else, the story telling in Ultimate Spidey is Marvelous. Luckily the game isn't bad either, in fact, although this design is still a generation ahead of its time (pedestrians appear blocky and the skyline fades into flat shaded polys) this is yet another fine game, thanks to the added Venom levels and a comic book version of Spiderman I can finally get behind. Completing City Goals (races, rescues, arrests, and combat tours) open up Mission Goals where the meat resides: vintage Spidey with added Venom...lots of bark, lots of bite and more high-flying Marvel gaming goodness than any of us deserve. Love the bosses too; camera gets a bit tricky fighting them but you'll live. Dave Halverson

"...lots of bark, lots of bite and more high-flying Marvel gaming goodness..."

Donkey Kong Country 3

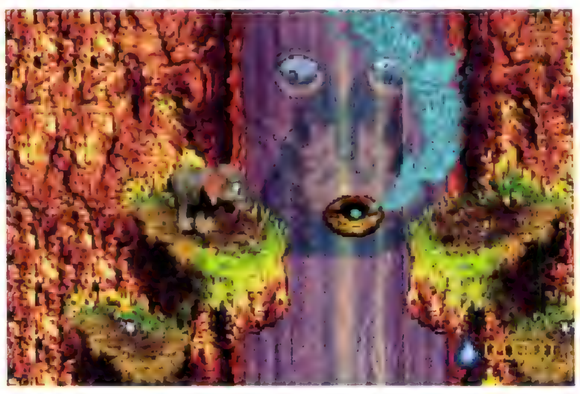
Game Boy Advance

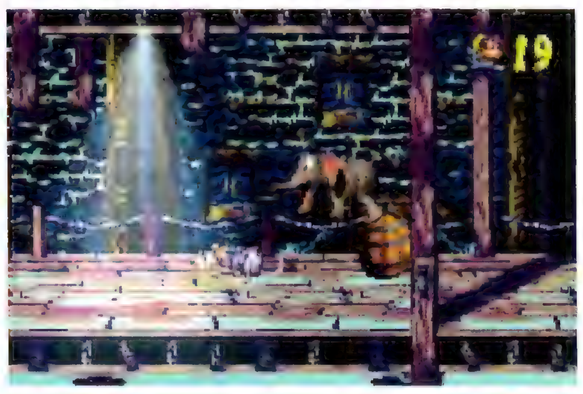
9.0 Score

Developer: Rare **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** October

There's nothing I can tell you about DKC 3 that you don't already know but to refresh your memory this is the one starring Dixie and Kiddy Kong; Rare's third and in my opinion second best, after DKC 2 in a series that shocked and rocked a nation with photo real 16-bit 2D. Between Dixie's hover and prehensile hair and Kiddy's brawn 3 is jam packed with the usual pattern based mayhem on land, through caverns, and undersea, with an extra helping of switch pulling and ape-specific level devices. Since 2D never really evolved far beyond this point the game of course not only holds up but is a true blessing as it looks absolutely magnificent on the Micro screen. 2D may be gone but it will never be forgotten. If only Cranky had actually gotten his Cranky Kong Country; he'd have shown all us whippersnappers a thing or two, by golly.

Dave Halverson





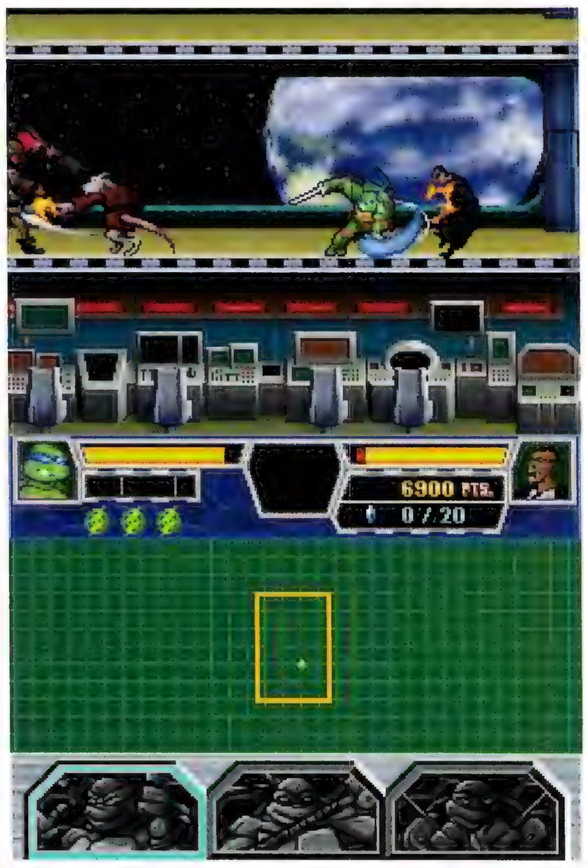
TMNT: Mutant Nightmare

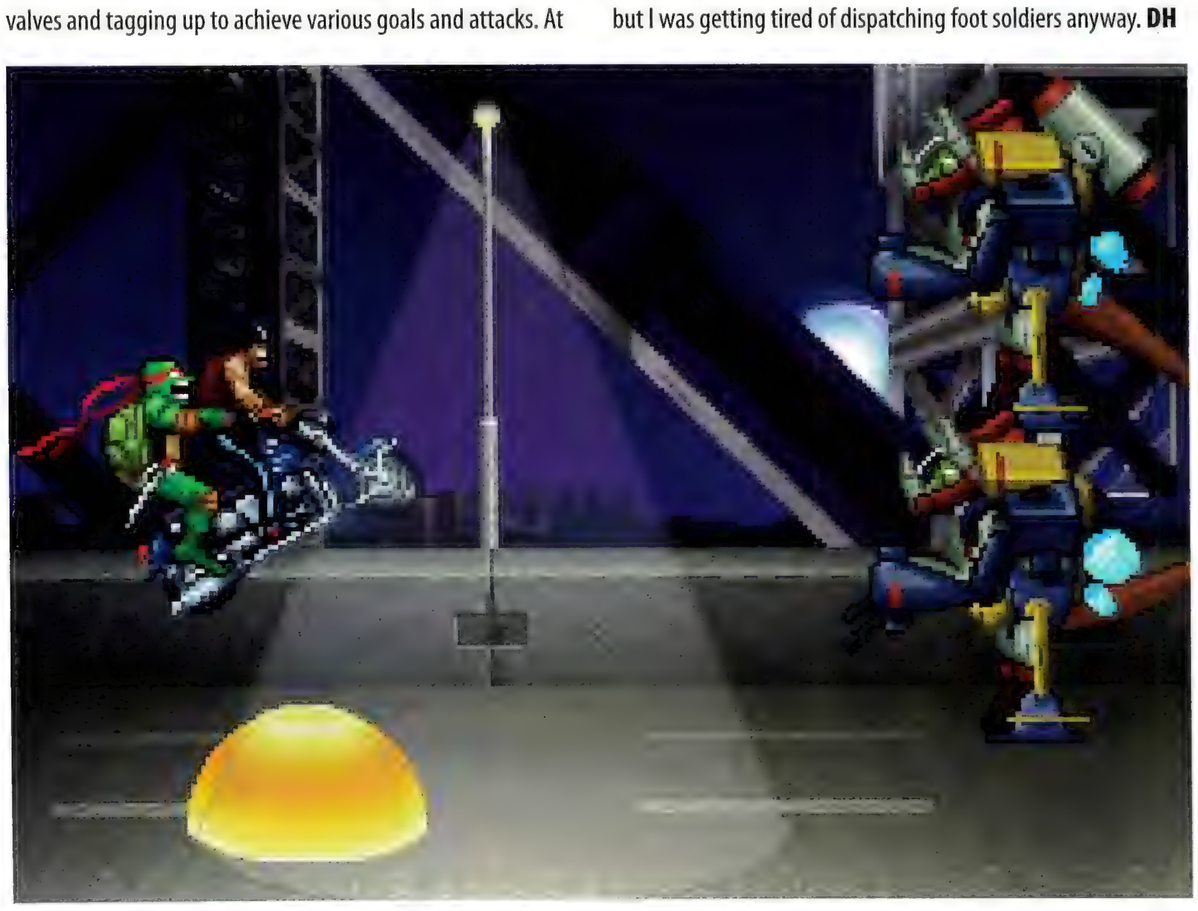
Nintendo DS

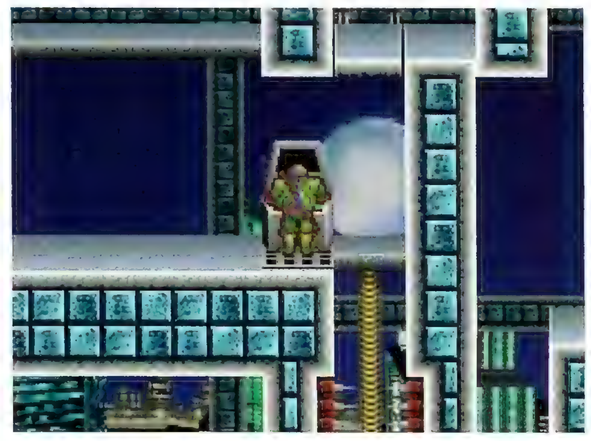
Preview

Developer: Konami **Publisher:** Konami **Multiplayer:** 4-player co-op **Available:** October

Unlike the latest console version, TMNT Mutant Nightmare is faring really well on the DS. By combining traditional Konami 2D action with touch screen implemented buddy play—a turtle for all reasons—we get the best of both worlds; more great 2D Turtles action along with some competent new DS features like opening and closing valves and tagging up to achieve various goals and attacks. At key moments in the game depending on who your core turtle is touching, the designated touch screen turtle will have the desired effect. All the while the series-endemic platforming and sewer crawling looks and plays as well as ever. It's not the same foe, as the Turtles have taken to time travel, battling the Triceratons (bi-pedal Triceratops with a taste for turtle soup) but I was getting tired of dispatching foot soldiers anyway. **DH**







When in the Course of Yes, of course I can fly! These wing… aren't for looks you know! The can accordingly Hammer… Laguz among Hammerne of the earth, the separate… station to Crimea Laws of Nature a… them, Daein respect here we of… should declare th… th… truths to h… y are …

called together legislative bodies at places unusual, …nd distant from the depository of their Public sole… into compliance …ive Houses …n the …such …isla- …the …ean …nd …on …is …and …e has …ssent to …s Soren …ount threin …their salaries. …g's breath! Even …plete scum. He has …g Armies without the …rfected Bolganone the …the Civil Power. He has …to a king. Spells are simple, …ur laws; giving his Assent. …whereas this is complex …than mine! Wow, your …: For cutting off our …mposing Mordecai …lthunder of Trial by …be tried for pretended …tem of English Laws in a …rein an Arbitrary govern- …as to render it at Soren an …cing the same absolute rule …arters, abolishing our …entally the beorc …atures, and declar- … for us in all Ike … injuries and …ent of an …Facts be … Laws, … has …sing …nt …

IN A LAND OF MAN AND BEAST, YOUR SMALL BAND OF MERCENARIES MUST NOW SAVE THE WORLD FROM A REAWAKENING EVIL FORCE. YOU'LL MAKE YOUR FIGHT ON THE 3D BATTLEFIELDS OF TELLIUS, WHERE STRATEGY IS ESSENTIAL AND DEATH IS FINAL. SO SHARPEN YOUR AXE. DRAW YOUR SWORD. IT'S TIME TO IGNITE THE FLAMES OF WAR.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence

DOLBY PRO LOGIC II

NINTENDO GAMECUBE™

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Burnout

8.5 Score

PSP

Developer: G-Artists **Publisher:** Bandai **Multiplayer:** 4p versus **Available:** September

Life in the slow lane is no life at all. With speed and gusto aplenty, the destruction-minded racer Burnout Legends takes its place in the sun, proving almost as potent as the three Burnout titles it liberally swipes its content from. Players are rewarded frequently and encouraged to plow onward with unlockable goodies, and Legends also supplies a wonderful complement of races and destructive challenges to be taken on or skipped at will. The caveats here are few as the developers did a nice job of capturing Burnout's breathless sense of velocity as well as its wicked series of car crashes and explosions on the PSP. Still, vehicles float and glide more than in the console Burnouts and while this problem is not crippling, it is exacerbated by the PSP's tiny screen and the game's resultant readjustment of its draw distances. Oncoming traffic and environmental obstacles are now harder to spot, let alone avoid, than they need be. **Greg Orolando**

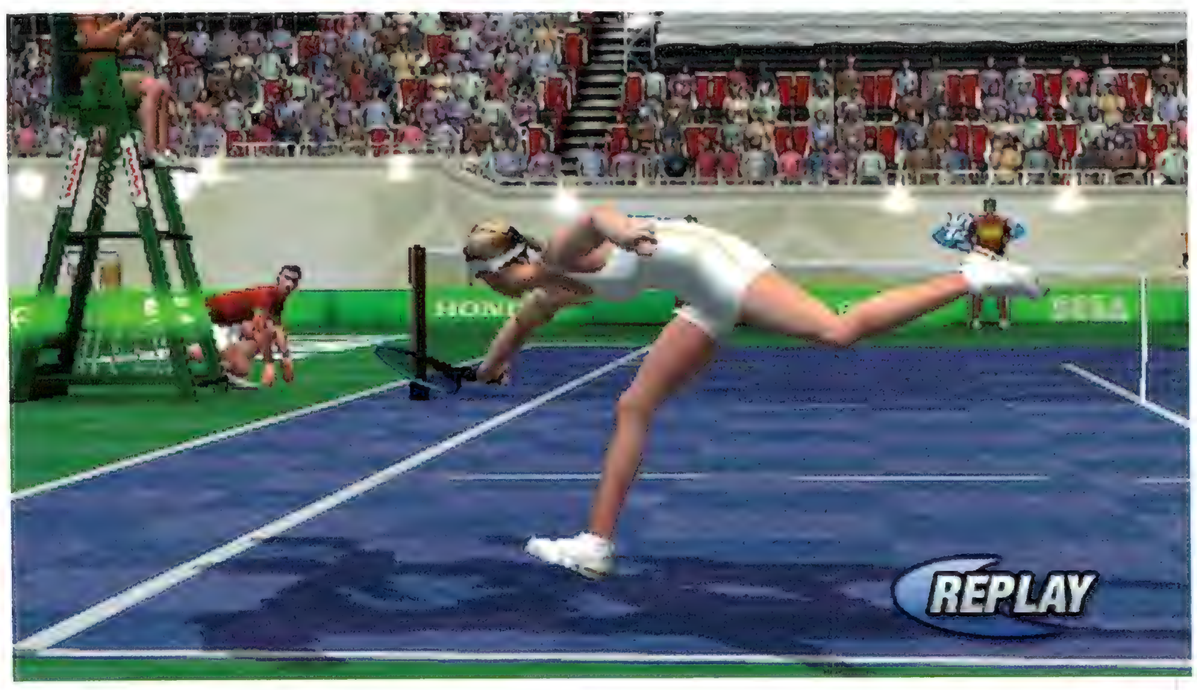
Virtua Tennis World Tour

9.0 Score

Nintendo DS

Developer: Sega/Sumo Digital **Publisher:** Sega **Multiplayer:** 1-4p Wireless Support **Available:** September

What defines a great tennis game? Where superstar endorsements from both the men's and women's draw—and this game's got them—and multiple modes of play end, intuitive gameplay begins and is the true essence of any virtual tennis game. Just ask anyone who's ever played Tennis on NES. Sega's VT World Tour takes not only intuitive control but reactive animation to the next level and the ground level camera option provides some of the most realistic play yet. The way the players pre-empt and react to near misses and dives is astonishingly realistic. The only drawback here is that the characters don't so much look like themselves in terms of facial features. Sharapova's game for instance is certainly represented while her frame and visage are not, as it goes on down the line for pretty much both sides of the draw. **Dave Halverson**



Metroid Prime Pinball

9.0 Score

Nintendo DS

Developer: Nintendo **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** 8-player Wireless **Available:** October

Okay, the DS, officially, cannot get any cooler. Metroid Prime Pinball is positively trance-inducing. Enter sub levels off the Talon Overworld and Samus wall jumps with L&R; Metroid Mania has you blasting Metroids for double points, spell S-A-M-U-S and she pops out of the surface and it turns into a multi-directional shooter…trigger Phazon, clone and other multi-balls, or score enough points and jump levels off to Phendrana Drifts or Phazon Mines where four-paddle boss fights (and they shoot back, as do Space Pirates) await, where you can take aim at or acquire and launch missiles battling massive top-screen behemoths. If it's Metroid it's in here, and looking absolutely amazing (gotta love the rain in the Talon Overworld and shattering ice crystals in the Phendrana Drifts) set against Indigenous music from the series (the Pirate Frigate is host to the original Metroid theme remixed) that will have you playing with your balls like they're really a rolled-up blonde deep-space bounty hunter. **Dave Halverson**

Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time

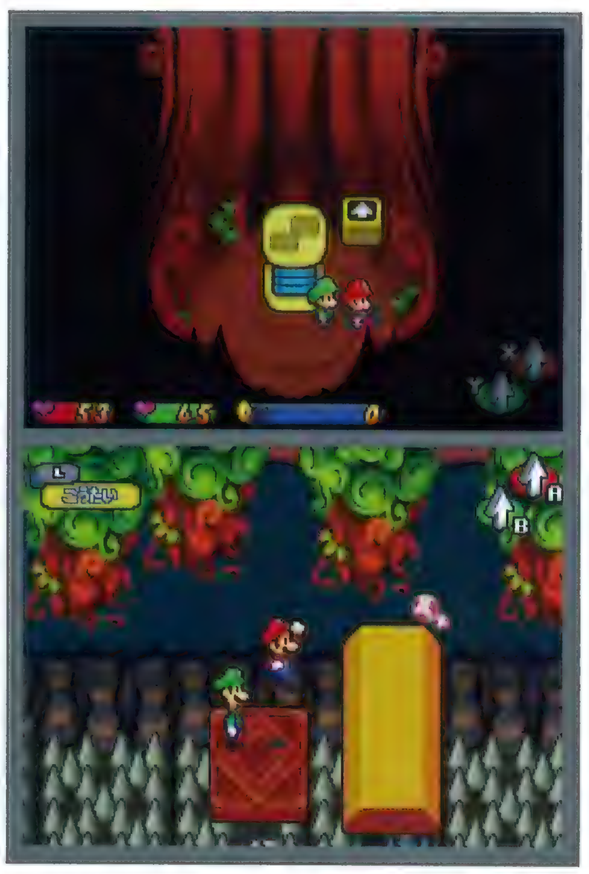
8.5 Score

Nintendo DS

Developer: Alphadream Corporation **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** October

I don't often get a good belly laugh from a video game, but then not many games pack the humorous charm of Mario and Luigi 2, a delightful adventure that has as much addictive gameplay going for it as that special Nintendo color. The game requires a very specific imagination, the kind that's reserved for the most dedicated of gamers, in tune to the characters' heritage and Japanese design eccentricities. Not everyone can find simple pleasure in Luigi babble-speak and Mario self-deprecation.

Familiar to anyone who played the original Mario and Lugi on GBA, this sequel mixes role-playing characteristics with an action incentive, playing off the classic platforming series' visual cues and mechanical staples, like jumping on ricocheting shells to dispose of the enemy in the turn-based battles. Baby Mario and Luigi now join the team, culled from the past from a time-travel stint—yeah, the story gets a wee bit drippy. With the four of them working in tandem, solving little puzzles and battling it out together, the game receives a nice little gameplay kick that stays simple but fun, even when it gets a bit protracted. Add in the nifty dual-screen presentation that expands the tangible dynamic of the world and you've got enough treasure to brighten the DS library. **Brady Fiechter**



Lunar: Dragon Song

6.5 Score

Nintendo DS

Developer: Game Arts / Japan Art Media **Publisher:** Ubisoft **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** October

Lunar: Dragon Song marks the first full-length RPG to come to the DS, and it definitely has its pros and cons. The art is magnificent, it still has that cozy old-school feel to it, and the soundtrack has that same polish that the Lunars of old possess. However, there are a couple of peculiar choices the developers seem to have made. . .running depletes your health (and doesn't regenerate), and the battle

modes (Virtue and Combat) are disappointing. Virtue allows you to fight creatures for experience, while Combat gives no experience, but creatures drop items. These items fulfill courier jobs, and those jobs net you cash for equipment. . . but combing an area twice (once for experience, again for items) becomes tedious and aggravating. Why can't we have our EXP and loot stuff, too? **Ashley Esqueda**

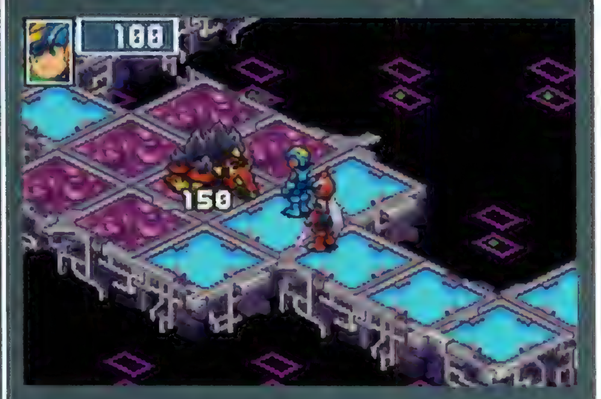
Mega Man Battle Network 5: Double Team

7.5 Score

Nintendo DS

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Multiplayer:** 4p Wireless Support **Available:** September

Let's be honest here: Battle Network 4 left a lot lacking for MM fans around the globe. Fortunately, MMBN5 has been ported to the DS with some improvements that only make the game more of a treat than its GBA counterpart. The story isn't stale this time around (it even manages to drop in a few plot twists), and long-time veterans can import chips from previous incarnations of the series. New and old players alike are able to link up and



battle in a number of modes, including team, single, team tournament and singles tournament. Players will also have the ability to trade chips back and forth with other MM aficionados to beef up their navi-arsenal. Jack in and enjoy this one. **Ashley Esqueda**

Mario Tennis Power Tour

8.5 Score

Game Boy Advance

Developer: Camelot Software Planning **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** 4p versus **Available:** October

As they are inclined to do with their handheld Mario sports titles, Camelot Software Planning have crafted something of a mini-RPG to form the backbone of Mario Tennis Power Tour. Taking cues from Mario Golf Advance Tour and their own Golden Sun series, Camelot's latest eschews the straightforward action formula of its GameCube counterpart. While you can jump right in and play an exhibition match with your favorite Mario characters, the long-term play can be found in the story mode. Here, you rise through the ranks of the Royal Tennis Academy by winning matches and leveling up, earning new abilites along the way. Of course, the tennis action itself is of great importance to the appeal of the game, and here the game is surprisingly close to its bigger brother, with the same addictive charge shots and simple, satisfying play. **Michael Hobbs**

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06

8.0 Score

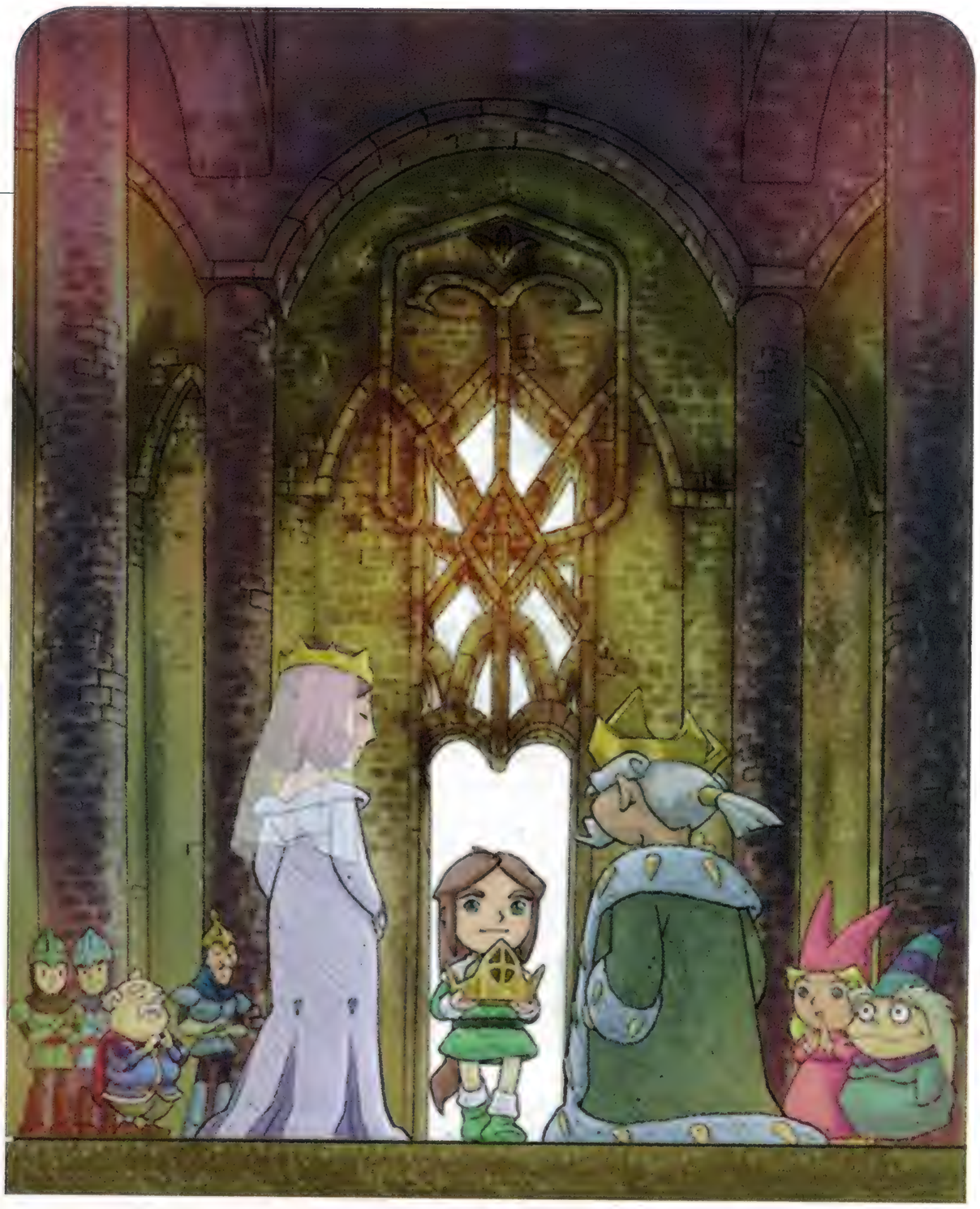
PSP

Developer: EA Sports **Publisher:** EA Sports **Multiplayer:** Head-to-head Wireless **Available:** August

While I didn't play the last Tiger Woods that much, I didn't want to, because the load times were difficult to tolerate, and the overall presentation felt too stripped down. Was it just a rush job? Not this round. This latest offering on PSP is a much improved, almost-mirror image of the console versions in most the places that count. The swinging mechanism isn't quite what you might want if you're all about the bigger versions—time for that dual-analog peripheral—but there's no need to nitpick when everything plays so well as a handheld. You've got plenty of courses, options and modes to keep you hooked. **Brady Fiechter**

PoPoLoCrois

The PSP finally gets a magnificent RPG



Oh PoPoLoCrois, where do I begin? For those of you who aren't familiar with this franchise…get familiar. This RPG is brilliant, taking me back to the good old days when games like FFVII and Vagrant Story were king. They don't make RPGs like this anymore. In case you're wondering what PoPoLoCrois is, it's a kingdom where 10-year-old Prince Pietro has been raised by his father, since his mother died shortly after he was born. One night, he discovers that she isn't dead at all, just in a trance. A spell must be found to awaken her…a spell only available in the land of Bryonia, a floating island that only comes but once a year and brings monsters and discord to all the lands. Pietro decides he must awaken his mother by bringing back the book from the library in Bryonia, and sets off to make things right again.

The story has that perfect balance of humor, drama, and quirk that so few RPGs today achieve, and it's only magnified by the excellent battle system. Battles in PoPoLoCrois are fought with unique blends of grid-based (yet traditional) attacks, summon gems, and specials. When you get into battle, your characters move on a grid not unlike a strategy RPG…however, one player takes up four squares, so you can hit multiple enemies if you line up correctly. If you can't (or don't wish) to put a character in danger, you can skip a turn to power up that person… and combine forces with an ally that's also skipped their turn to pull off powerful combos. Leveling up never feels like a chore since you're constantly on the move from one area to the next, and the story is fluid but still entertaining and exciting.

> "The story has that perfect balance of humor, drama, and quirk that so few RPGs today achieve..."

When you play PoPoLoCrois, you feel like you've arrived home. Even the music has a special *je ne se quois* to it… When you defeat something in battle, the chime that rings makes you smile in a way that you haven't in a long time. PoPoLoCrois has the right combination of whimsy, excitement, exploration, and it's just plain *fun*. If you've been waiting for an RPG for the PSP, this is it. **Ashley Esqueda**

PoPoLoCrois — **9.0** Score

PSP

The PSP's first RPG is elegant, fun, and bursting with old-school RPG charm.

Traversing the land can feel like a chore when you're running between towns attempting to finish a quest.

Developer: SCEI **Publisher:** Agetec Inc.
Multiplayer: None **Available:** October

Little Prince Pietro dashes through another beautiful backdrop.

Frogger Helmet Chaos

6.5 Score

PSP

Developer: Konami **Publisher:** KCE Hawaii **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** September

Evil reptiles have created a helmet that hypnotizes its wearer, and it's up to our green hero Frogger to save the day. Helmet Chaos doesn't stray far from the original game's formula…it's still grid-based, although the graphics have been updated quite a bit from its first incarnation to the PSP's widescreen. The game is vibrant, mildly entertaining, and offers an array of puzzles to solve while you navigate Frogger through each level. Bouncing kittens (that are being tossed out of a burning building, no less) off of a lilypad was actually fun, entertaining, and hilarious. Although I'm a little peeved by the fact that Frogger still can't swim, Helmet Chaos is a fun little romp that does the franchise right. **Ashley Esqueda**a

Generation of Chaos

Preview

PSP

Developer: Idea Factory **Publisher:** Nippon Ichi Software **Multiplayer:** TBD **Available:** Q2 2006

Relentlessly bringing us one SRPG after another, NIS is at it again, teaming up with Idea Factory to bring a signature SRPG to your PSP library. Generation of Chaos boasts a robust and deep strategy experience, as you begin with a small, weak kingdom and branch out, conquering other kingdoms and expanding your armies. It's looking gorgeous with incredible character art, and a the battle system hasn't been watered down for the handheld market; in fact, GoC ups the SRPG ante, showing off 30 vs. 30 battles and pushing the PSP's limits in ways that will make SRPG fans giddy. This is a war that could prove incredibly fun and satisfying… Ready the troops! **Ashley Esqueda**

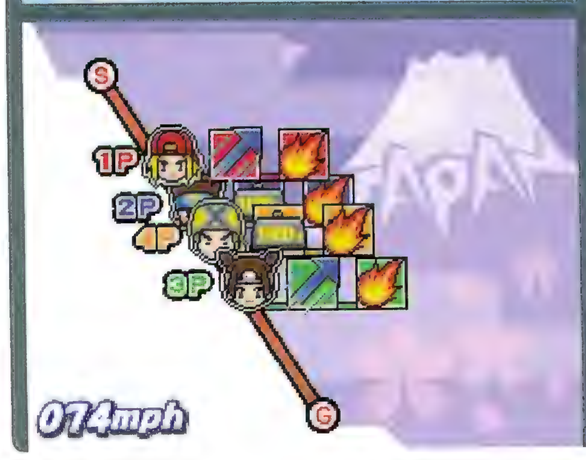
Snowboard Kids SBK

Preview

Nintendo DS

Developer: Atlus Co. **Publisher:** Atlus Co. **Multiplayer:** TBA **Available:** Q2 2006

Boarding fans might look at SBK and brush it off as a kid's game, but it's worth a second look. SBK is fresh and making use of the DS in a fun way. Using the touch screen as a sort of mini-game within a mini-game, you'll be required to touch certain spots on the DS screen to pull off huge air and killer combos. Racing other players has an almost Mario Kart-like feel to it, as you'll sail through boxes, each offering some sort of powerup (or weapon). Offering board customization and different characters to choose from (each with their own pros and cons), SBK looks to be a title with high replay value and even higher fun factor. **Ashley Esqueda**



Formula Front: Armored Core Special Edition

7.0 Score

PSP

Developer: From Software **Publisher:** Agetec Inc. **Multiplayer:** 1-2 **Available:** October

With apologies to Quiet Riot, this metal health may well drive you mad. Armored Core as done on the PSP remains as menu heavy and customization option-laden as its console forebears, but this makes for an awkward handheld experience. Edition's density is unrepentant and the demands on a player's time are severe; mech-based warfare takes a back seat to behind-the-scenes strategy and item manipulation to such an extent that the game is not conducive to on-the-go play sessions. Even the manual control for the robots in combat emerges as moderately jerky and ungainly enough exercise to suggest it was someone's idea of an afterthought. Rock-em and sock-em, these robots do, but Agetec takes far too long to get them in the ring. **Greg Orlando**

Review

Black & White 2

A spectacle of godly light and sound

Recommended system specs	
OS: Windows XP	Video: GeForce 6/Radeon X800
Processor: 2.4 GHz CPU	Sound: Dx9 compatible
Memory: 1 GB RAM	Internet: N/A

Lionhead is on a roll, and Black & White 2 will not diminish that hot streak. The game's technology and production values are better than ever and B&W 2 reaps the benefits, raising the experience of this sequel to epic proportions. There's also more flexibility to rule as you wish.

Black & White 2's greatest asset is its freedom of alignment. As the leader of your civilization and creature avatar, you can essentially bounce between godly moods as you see fit. It pays off to build massive and ornate towns to win over the approval of nearby towns, thus drawing their people to your paradise, but this is not a path you need to adhere to. You can create a bustling metropolis only to become a warmonger using all of the eagerly recruited peons to fatten your army. Should you continue down this path of war, your force will swell into an incredible mass. These skirmishes look amazing, and much like B&W 2's global control scheme, it's a breeze to move your troops around. You can temper this terror by welcoming the infidels to live in your town, where you might tax them with torture. You can develop into a deity so festering evil that your on-screen god hand becomes scaled and tattooed, and the surface of the planet in and around your area of worship becomes tainted, charred and demonic.

When B&W 2 is peaking, with miracles and magic, huge clashes and world shifting effects, there's really no show quite like it in all of gaming. It looks absolutely thrilling in its best moments. The chatter of your townsfolk and warriors, and the inner thoughts—a great touch—of opposing leaders, match the near perfect vocal delivery of the emissaries that guide you. This is a truly vast and enchanting hybrid RTS only slightly marred by minor camera pains (altitude can do funny things) and perhaps a few under realized god powers. **Mike Griffin**

Help your loyal followers...or eat them.

Black & White 2 — 8.5 Score

PC

Top-notch visuals and sound. Excellent control scheme will keep you playing, not struggling to manage the world.

Some quirky camera movement. More basic godly effects in standard world building sections would have been nice.

Developer: Lionhead Studios **Publisher:** EA Games
Online: None **Available:** October

"You can develop into a deity so festering evil that your on-screen god hand becomes scaled and tattooed..."

Review

Bet On Soldier: Blood Sport

The stakes are too high

Recommended system specs	
OS: Windows XP	Video: GeForce 6/Radeon X800
Processor: 2.4 GHz CPU	Sound: Dx9 compatible
Memory: 1 GB RAM	Internet: Broadband

Kylotonn's Bet On Solider isn't firing on all cylinders, but it comes close. The game's basic premise involves an alternate 1998 where the world is devastated by corporate-sponsored war. Real war is now a televised event, and hotshot soldiers have become superstar athletes in a deathmatch broadcast. The campaign has you blasting through the frontlines as a rising star in the Bet on Soldier show.

Bet on Soldier plays like a contemporary action FPS, but at key points you'll face off against another BOS contender for cash prizes. Fences drop down to seal off nearby exits, the TV show announces your opponent in an irritatingly non-skippable cut-scene and a countdown begins the 1-on-1 Bet round. These deathmatch duels can occur right in the midst of warfare (not simply end level boss fights), and a win will fatten your credit account immediately. You can then use that cash to refill weapons and armor at repair stations dotted throughout the level. Using a very similar mechanism, you can also bet on human opponents in the multiplayer mode. If each player agrees to face-off, they can meet at an area where the actual multiplayer level becomes a dueling ground.

There's a story in there too, and a pretty good attempt to give the game an epic feel, but the overall design and polish can't keep up. Despite layers of shiny bump and normal-mapped armor and weaponry, the troops fundamentally do not animate very well. It's cool that your squad mates spot and announce enemies by class and type, but most of the VO is pretty lackluster. To save your game mid-level you must purchase save points at static terminals. No cash = no mid-level save. Several other minor miscues must be endured, and it's basically a checklist of stuff that a much larger QA department may have stamped out.

The aforementioned is unfortunate, because when Bet On Soldier's action really heats up later in the campaign, the level design and intensity improve dramatically. And the multiplayer depth, with all the betting and class upgrades and repair terminals...much potential. It's a recommended shooter, but do expect some wobbly elements. **Mike Griffin**

"Real war is now a televised event."

Bet On Soldier: Blood Sport — 7.0 Score

PC

Many solid action sequences deeper in the game. The betting system has loads of untapped potential.

Good presentation is sabotaged by dubious animations and amateur voice over. Mid-level save system is too arbitrary.

Developer: Kylotonn Entertainment **Publisher:** Digital Jesters
Online: 32-player multiplayer **Available:** September

Review

Quake 4

The confident continuance of a classic

Recommended system specs	
OS: Windows 2k/XP	Video: GeForce 6/Radeon X800
Processor: 2.4 GHz CPU	Sound: Audigy 2+
Memory: 1 GB RAM	Internet: Broadband

Quake 4 utilizes the Doom 3 engine in spectacular fashion.

Let's dispatch Quake 4's campaign length, front and center: we put in just shy of twelve hours before the end credits rolled. This may or may not be important to you, based on how you intend to measure your mileage with Quake 4. What Raven and id have provided in this sequel's campaign is a big, loud and powerful sci-fi action FPS experience; a dozen or so hours of triple-A presentation locked into a stretch of easily consumed narrative that finally explores the central players and themes of the franchise, cementing an identity to build upon in future titles. And despite a few underwhelming sidetracks, it's a great run. Gauge the full potential of Quake 4 by also incorporating its assertively simple and supremely addictive multiplayer modes, and the game's full worth begins to crystallize.

Quake 4 looks great. In fact, it's drop-dead gorgeous at times. The high standard sort of comes with the territory—especially in futuristic indoor sets—when you have the Doom 3 engine conducting things. Raven's artists use deep colors, fog and lighting to work that incomparable bump-mapped shadow play to great effect. You may even find yourself lingering in certain key interior locales simply to absorb the layers of gleaming technology and gore. It's an interesting nod to gaming's artistic diversity that we can look at a game like Okami, let's say, and melt into its beautiful traditional cell texturing, while a title like Quake 4, this brute of menacingly atmospheric biomechanical environments, can elicit a similar appreciative thrill. On the other hand, there are some weaker areas. Big explosion effects (for stuff like crashing air ships) look pretty canned, and where Quake 4's indoors and characters impress with staggering detail, the outdoor levels can be somewhat wearying in terms of geometry and palette choices, while the skybox art encasing the horizon is inexplicably low-res at times. Also, the undulating intestine effect (a familiar sight for Doom 3 players) really doesn't look so hot when the textures are being stretched at weird angles. Such contrasts are easy to come by when drawn alongside the best visuals that Quake 4 offers, and the fact is: even if you crammed a close approximation of Quake 4's level design into the *Doom 2* engine…it'd still be worth playing.

Yes, Quake 4 delivers some incredible action to tie everything together, but the campaign gameplay is guilty of being slightly formulaic at times. It rehashes many objective-based devices from previous FPS titles and, as mentioned, allots far too much screen time to mission sidetracks that frankly do very little to heighten tension or support the game's pacing. You know the drill: activate the generator, locate the database, flip the door lock, etc. Within the game's pleasantly nuanced military theme, these are perfectly suitable sub-tasks, fortified by instances of character and plot development such as Earth marines conversing—a timbre of fear and respect in their voices—about the Strogg's imposing technology. Placed inside the flow of Quake 4's action, however, these side-missions sometimes introduce a sense of fragmentation; you can feel them pulling awkwardly at the game's momentum. If Quake 4 had a more open-ended campaign this wouldn't be an issue; then again, it also wouldn't be the same focused action experience when it counts most.

Quake 4 ploughs ahead with great vigor and righteous firepower through its big action set pieces. Strategy is built on straightforward twitch fire and cover: outmaneuver the Strogg infantry's basic team tactics while dodging and shooting (plenty of missiles to blow out of the sky) the

"Raven's artists use deep colors, fog and lighting to work that incomparable bump-mapped shadow play to great effect."

projectiles of larger and more exotic foes. There are mounted-gun levels on rails with somewhat predictable, but nonetheless well-orchestrated breaks and triggers, and the mech walker sequences—the strongest outdoor level design in the game—feature some thrilling long-range battles. The medic and repair squad mates that occasionally tag along through missions are thankfully equipped with enough AI to know their role and stay out of the way. They also animate rather well, much like all of Quake 4's humanoid characters, so they look convincing and alive…until an elite cyborg skewers them at the end of a massive hand blade. Weapons feel precise and balanced: fundamentals like the reload, cool down, impact and splash radius of each piece provides satisfying results. There's a certain minimalism to these weapon designs—even the alien Strogg ordnance—that's very specific to the Quake universe, and Raven has nailed it. And a well-deserved kudos to the progressive enhancements added to weaponry over the course of the game: you don't feel like you're starting with a lame stripped-down model…your guns just get *a lot* better as the game proceeds.

We reviewed Quake 4 well before any multiplayer demo or public servers went live, but that didn't stop the folks at Activision from throwing their best QA guys into the ring with us for a full day of fragging. First and foremost, just like Fata1ity mentioned last month, the multiplayer gameplay feels a lot like Quake 3—and that's a good thing. You have the chunkier hitboxes on characters, proper strafe jumping, and the rail and lightning guns bring a familiar speed and timing. The rocket launcher may be a smidgeon slower, but Quake 4 isn't really trying to *be* Q3, so little changes should be expected. Level design for the core deathmatch maps is excellent: fast paths and angles with intelligent platform and weapon locations. The CTF environments seem to pull some architectural influence from recent Unreal titles and choke points are deliberately spaced to keep a reasonable flow between Strogg and Marine territories. It's hard to say whether Quake game will enjoy the same level of competitive success as franchise predecessors (the genre is *very* busy this season), but id and Raven have obviously tried to keep things simple, familiar and addictive for fans.

Ultimately Quake 4 falls a little short of living up to its considerable hype, but that certainly doesn't preclude it from being a game you should own, whether right now on your PC (see system specs, top) or in about a month on your Xbox 360. It's an impressive first person shooter to behold, the engine proving to be a near-perfect match for Raven's designs. And despite a few ill-conceived lulls in the flow of gameplay, the campaign is entertaining to be a part of—aided by some arresting ambience and the quality VO of actors Charles Napier and Peter Stormare. Then there's the pedigree of Quake 4's multiplayer…a sugarcoating we'll inevitably be making use of. **Mike Griffin**

Quake 4 — **8.5** Score

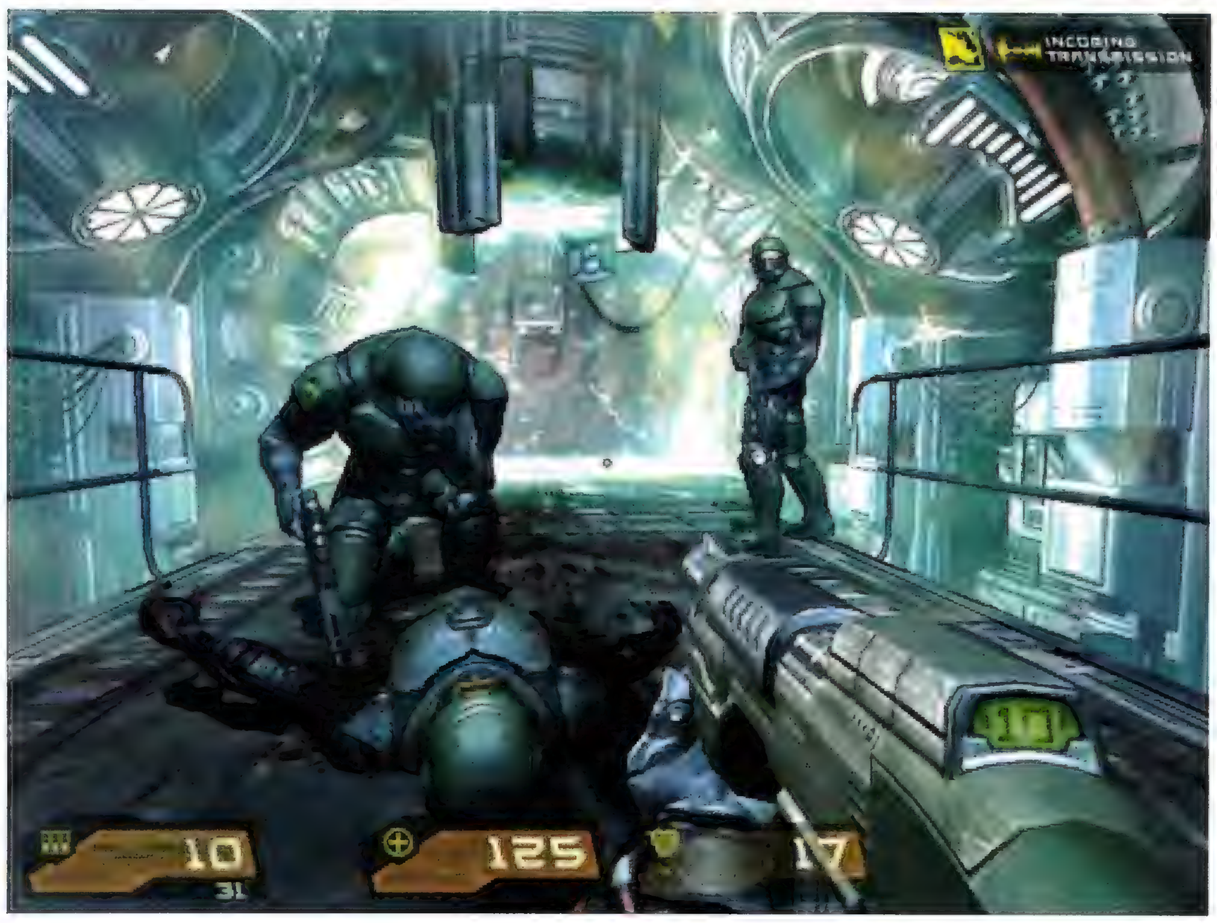
PC

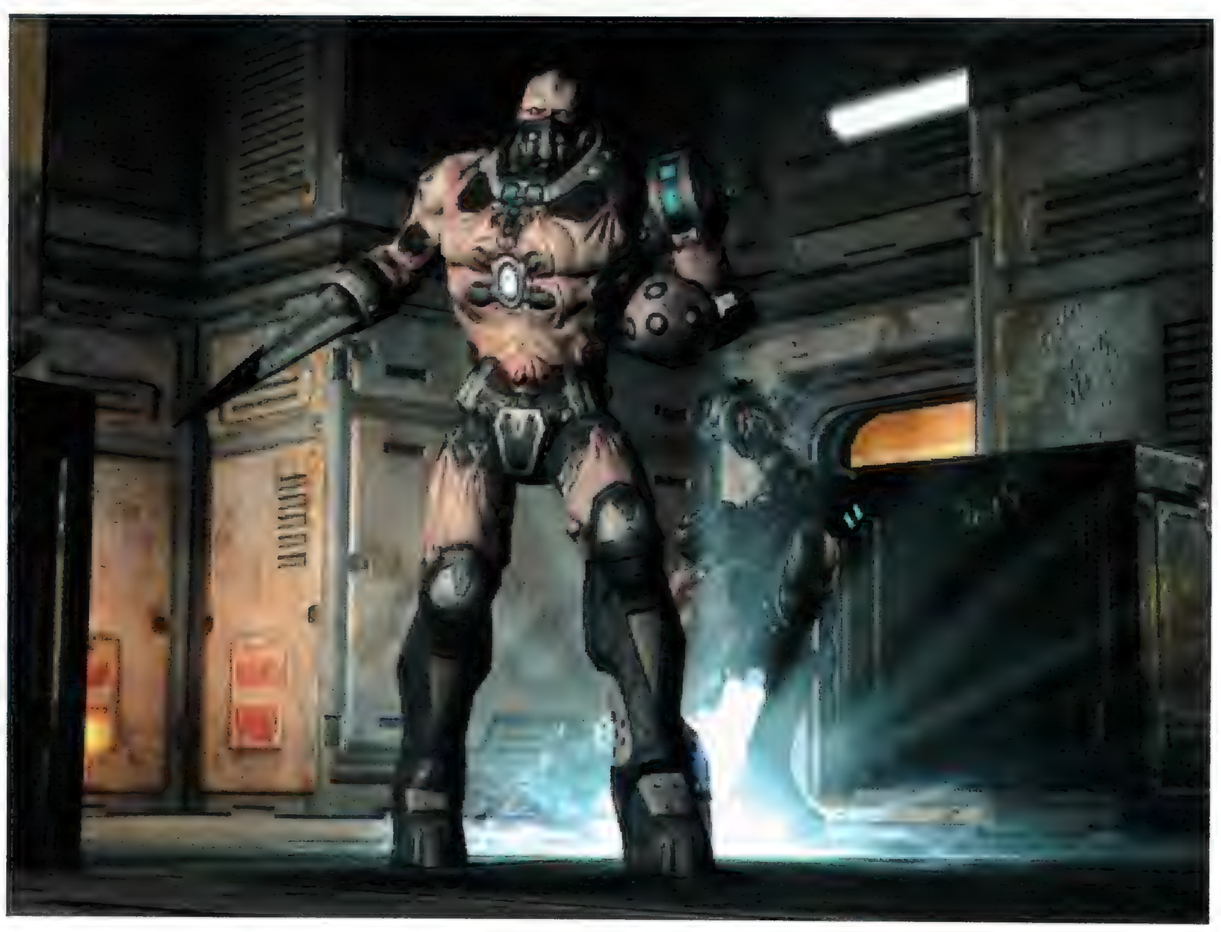
+ Amazing presentation for the most part. Plenty of "Holy Sh!t" moments that will stay with you. Solid multiplayer.

− Too short, and a few too many cliche objectives that break up the rhythm. Minor visual discrepancies stand out.

Developer: Raven Software **Publisher:** Activision
Online: Capture the Flag, Deathmatch, Team DM **Avail:** Oct/Nov

An onslaught of biomechanical mutations, ready to rip you to pieces.





Preview

RF Online

The lateset online phenom heads west

Codemasters left an entire community of dedicated and salivating fans hanging last year when it cancelled Dragon Empires, the oft-delayed and much-maligned MMO project they had been preparing for years. On the brink of that cancellation, the company had already been ramping up preparations for a full server and subscription service, so it wasn't exactly shocking news when Codemasters recently announced a western publishing deal for the massively multiplayer title RF Online. Developed by CCR, RF (Rising Force) Online is currently giving Lineage 2 a run for its money in Korea, and Sega has picked it up for release across Japan this fall. Needless to say, it's a hot property.

"RF Online approaches the genre with familiar ideas that involve greater repercussions."

Conflict and desire

RF Online approaches the genre with familiar ideas that involve greater repercussions. Three very distinct factions have been realized, bound by a defining theme: control of resources. This mantra has been linked to every facet of gameplay. The Accretian Empire is a mechanized race comprised of soldiers and conquerors, whose primary mandate is to expand the totalitarian regime, acquire material and destroy all lesser civilizations in the path of expansion. The Cora Holy Alliance is an erudite race, frail of body but profoundly gifted in the magical arts. Founded upon centuries of internal strife and many religious divisions, the Cora people have united as one under their god, Disem, to defend against foreign attacks. The Bellato Union is a gnomish race with ranks of slippery-tongued traders and gifted mechanics. Their amazing robot battle units (controllable by players) tend to drive their offense, but a hint of magic also pervades this society. Driving the conflict between these three vastly different factions is the planet Novus, a spectacular world rich in metal, mineral and arcane treasures that each race desperately covets. The Accretians simply want to pillage and control the planet, while the Bellato Union see Novus as a merchant hotbed that must be acquired as a trading hub. The Cora faction simply want to preserve the arcane ruins of the world, deepen their religious ties to the land and receive the blessings of their deity. At the center of Novus is a gigantic mine that doubles as the game's realm-versus-realm battleground. Controlling the Crag Mine is the key to maintaining an advantage in the war for Novus.

Worth fighting for

Champions of the mines will naturally have their names immortalized on the Rising Force leader boards, and the top ranking players from each side could be given the opportunity to lead their faction into large-scale realm battles that occur every eight hours. A champion might even broker a temporary alliance with another faction when one side is becoming dangerously powerful. Winning in the mines has several important ancillary side effects as well. The material prize is a special ore that can be refined to make money or equipment. Without this ore, certain tiers of weapons and armor can't be crafted, so it's crucial to keep winning and keep the supply line flowing so your faction stays well equipped. RF Online will not have degradation in weapon or armor quality due to general use or death, so every freshly forged piece of ore-derived equipment is good for the long haul. Also of critical importance are the Talics: these are ore-based gems that act as weapon and armor enhancements—a familiar concept for any RPG player. Slot one in to an item to add extra attack, defense and magic stats. Interestingly, players not attracted to extreme combat can also help to make progress for the good of their race as expert Crafters. Exotic Talics will prove to be a significant source of crafting advancement and a welcome boon on the battlefield.

Rising to the occasion

RF Online's character advancement takes the "job" approach so common to Asian MMOs, where multi-classing is very popular. And while it's always best to strengthen core abilities, RF will let players pile a ton of development into specific areas through a mastery gauge that covers virtually every class of weapon and magic. The more you use any one power, be it an Accretian ranger's wicked mounted rocket or the healing wind of a Cora healer, the more experience and skill points you will earn in that particular discipline. The Bellato Union make good use of mountable robot units, and as we've witnessed in the Japanese beta, a fully mastered high level Bellato mech is a force to be reckoned with. Each race has similar high level perks, such as the Cora's powerful spiritual minions that can be summoned forth to heal and fight. The faction PvP certainly has an important place in RF Online's grand scheme, but there's also a full RPG experience in each realm where players can run through quests and beef up their characters the old fashioned way: by slaughtering monsters that drop loot. Maybe even phat lewt.

Early hands-on play confirms that RF Online is a very approachable MMO. Camera use, control and targeting are quickly intuitive, and the interface emphasizes hotkeys, shortcuts and auto-equipping with minimal clicks and drags. The engine is just slightly dated, though it will allow maximum scalability so mid-range PC users can take part in the Crag Mines without having their frame rate choke. Any lacking complexity is easily compensated for by superb artistic direction in the form and color of each realm. The game also has a very good symphonic soundtrack. It would appear that Codemasters has made a well-informed decision by acquiring RF Online. What comes next—how CM handles the localization, community building, and western-influenced gameplay tweaks—will decide RF Online's fate. **Mike Griffin**

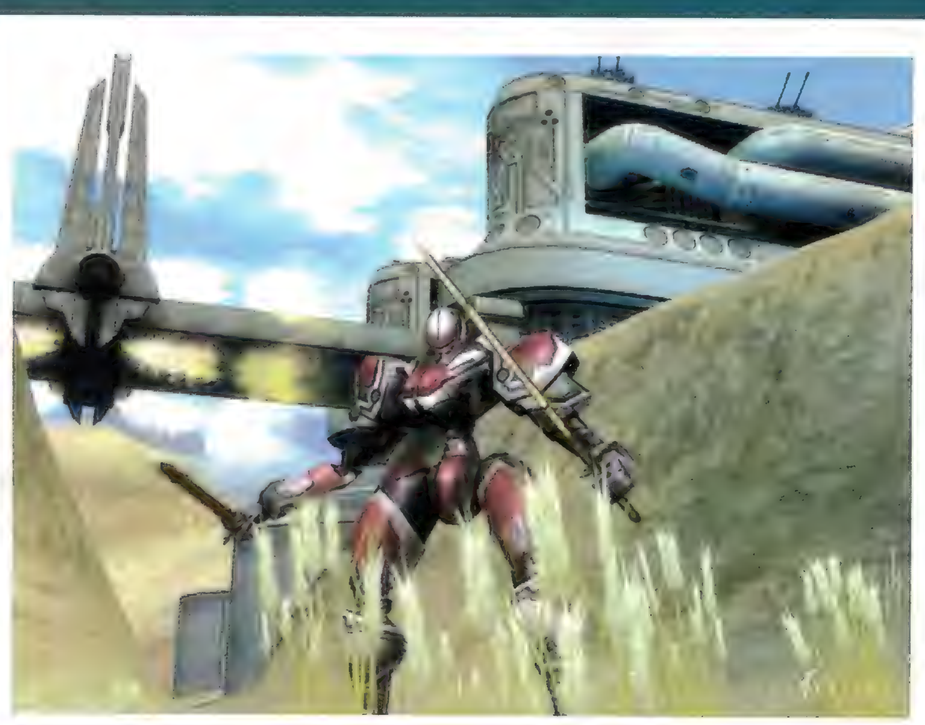
RF Online

PC

Point of Interest

Die-hard PvPers can use a tactical bird's eye camera mode to assess the playing field from high above.

Developer: CCR **Publisher:** Codemasters
Online: Massively Multiplayer **Available:** Q1 2006



Deep character development and stellar visuals…if Codemasters can ensure balanced PvE and PvP gameplay, we may have a winner.

Postscript

Froghop: connecting your addiction

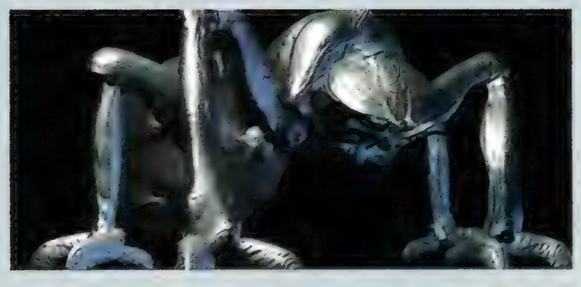
Ever wonder what it would be like to open your MMO character inventory...on your cell phone? Or how about pinging your guild leader through in-game chat to discuss how the raid is going...from the back of a taxi? Maybe some quick item crafting or housekeeping through your mobile handset during a lunch break, dialed right into the server of your chosen online RPG? A company called Froghop is now exploring such possibilities and several MMO publishing suitors are vying to use the new technology platform.

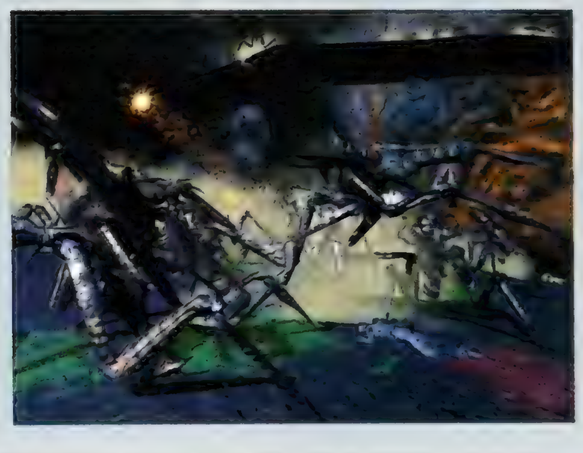
The buzzword here is "Trans Medial Access", or TMA, and Froghop is exploring ways to use their platform to allow mobile users to interact with their favorite persistent worlds, such as thematic mini-games played through mobile devices that yield experience point rewards inside the full MMO. We'll know more about Froghop's long term plans soon, including partnerships and service.

Starship Troopers: still squashing bugs

One of Empire Interactive's biggest fall titles is surfacing after a slight delay. Starship Troopers, developed by Strangelite, will take players back to the planet Hesperus where a battered human colony is struggling against hordes of alien bugs. Events in this sophisticated shooter begin about five years after the second film, and the war is not going well.

You dive right into the thick of it as a marine, surrounded by the sets and colors of the first two films across infiltration and large-scale operations. Classic scenes from the first film where hundreds of bugs clatter across the battlefield are being rendered convincingly through Strangelite's SWARM engine. They claim the engine is capable of all the Dx9 effects of Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 in addition to being specially designed for extremely model-intensive scenes. Regarding the game's music: word from composer Richard Jacques is that we should expect energetic combat tunes, and there could be some rousing military rolls reminiscent of the great original film score by Basil Poledouris. The genre is stuffed this fall, but who can resist giant exploding bugs?





NPD PC Game Sales

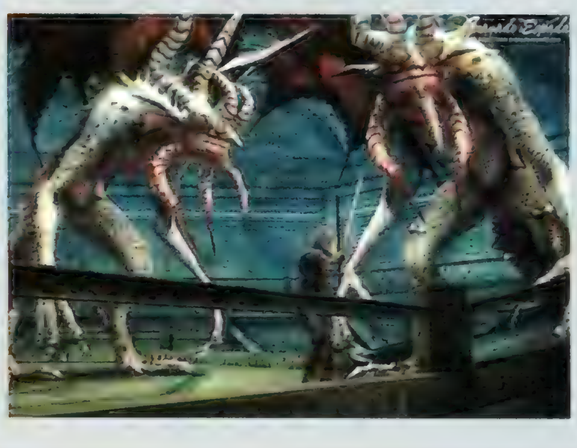
Week of Sept. 11 - Sept. 17, 2005

01. The Sims 2: Nightlife (Expansion Pack) - EA
02. EverQuest: Depths Of Darkhollow (Expansion Pack) - Sony Online Ent.
03. World Of Warcraft - Vivendi Universal
04. Battlefield 2 - EA
05. EverQuest II: Dessert Of Flames (Expansion Pack) - Sony Online Ent.
06. Guild Wars - NCsoft
07. Dungeon Siege 2 - Microsoft
08. The Sims 2 - EA
09. Aquazone Desktop Garden 1.0 - Allume Systems
10. The Sims Deluxe - EA

Granado Espada making waves in Far East

The massively multiplayer boom continues to spread like wildfire across Asia, and Hitachi, one of Japan's largest electronics companies, is entering the fray as Hanbit Ubiquitous Entertainment—a joint venture with Korean MMO giant Hanbit. Their first big release will be Granado Espada, developed by Korea's IMC, and it features character designs by Tomomi Kobayashi of SaGa (Square) series fame as well as hotshot Korean artist Limha Lekan, who recently worked with Phantagram and Game Arts.

Granado Espada presents an interpretation of 17th century colonization and follows the people and factions that have arrived in the New World. There's also magic and darkness afoot, of course. GE will introduce some interesting new ideas to the genre, including the MCC (Multi Character Control) system. Basically, every player gets to control three characters simultaneously in GE, something that's never been done before in an MMO. Unlike the simple pet control of other online RPGs, in Granado Espada you fully develop and control all three characters, swapping between them as you wish. Your two AI party members will immediately support you based on their current stance (offensive or defensive), and also according to the character class you're using. The AI plays off the combination of the three classes. This neatly solves two issues: First off, it deters players from creating automated bot programs because all three characters must be controlled to succeed in combat. Granado Espada also considers the idea of selling game items and currency for real-life money, and how that can be mitigated. Where players have focused on item and equipment collections in the past, GE will have a mercenary market-style system designed for the trading of complete characters. Characters you've created on your own will even keep the names you first give them, although they will adopt their new owners' family name if traded.



Several more genuinely intriguing innovations are being planned for Granado Espada. Stuff like a Replay function, to perhaps record and review your strategies against bosses or in team-versus-team skirmishes. The Japanese beta will be activating several hundred extra testers then scaling up with thousands more before the late '05 or early '06 launch of the game—now being heralded as a major MMO launch.

BATTLEFIELD GEAR

Artillery

OCZ Gold Memory

Battle Tank

Grenade

Squad Automatic Weapons

Apache Helicopter

OCZ Modstream

Listen up soldier, we're at war! Are you armed and ready to enter the battlefield? Are you willing to risk another man's life because you came to combat with inferior fragging equipment? If you want to down the opposing force's vehicles and frag your enemy into shameful oblivion then I suggest you listen up! Here in the battlefield you need more than just an elite squad and an apache helicopter for terrain supremacy….you need the confidence and power that comes with an OCZ ModStream Power Supply, capable of infinite cable configurations and over 520W of system nourishing power. Don't forget to tune your weapons! Make every shot count with the ultra fast GX 3500 (Gamer eXtreme) Gold Edition memory, or decimate the competition with a DDR2 Gold 2GB or 4GB dual channel kit. Gear up soldier, and enter the battle equipped with the most potent weaponry….arm yourself with OCZ!

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play japan

We got a little hasty with our grand ambitions for Play Japan last month, perhaps not realizing the immense amount of space the Tokyo Game Show 2005 would require to cover. To that end, we've devoted the entire section to the event. We did get one prediction right, however: Lots o' developer interviews. In addition to some admittedly hastily-assembled TGS reportage, we've got seven interviews with some of the Japanese game industry's greatest luminaries to chew on. Next month should see us return to our regularly-scheduled programming.

< Nick Des Barres

Dai Kohama >

Show Report

words Nick Des Barres and Dai Kohama

f E3 was the revolution, TGS 2005 was its evolution. Call it E3.5 if you will. While nothing can quite top the simultaneous announcement of all three next-generation systems at once, TGS 2005 put up a valiant fight, with its debut of playable Xbox360, first look at proven-realtime PS3, and shock Nintendo announcement. It might not be able to compete this year in the sheer wow department, but Tokyo Game Show is simply more fun than E3...and not nearly as stressful. E3 is glitz, glam, and gauche. The feeling you get walking across the show floor is just this side of physical pain. TGS, while still quite a spectacle, is as serene as a Zen rock garden in comparison. No unnerving, constant techno thumping, no walking miles between halls, no crazy-eyed PR people haranguing you to death with big, glistening Lee Press-On Smiles, no bleached blondes with capped teeth shoving their artificial breasts in your face (instead, the breasts are tastefully natural). Plus there's the opportunity to experience the show with your fellow gamer: TGS has but one business-only day, with the following two being every man for himself, industry folk and general users alike rubbing shoulders. Numerically this disparity should not make sense -- E3 2005 had 70,000 attendees, TGS 176,000 -- but strangely enough, it does. The crowd density may be higher, and you may have to wait over two hours to play your favorite game on the public days, but something about TGS feels downright intimate.

Into this rarefied atmosphere is thrust the next generation of gaming, along with the glorious closing chapter of the previous. Shows in-between generations are always the most memorable (the 1995 and 2000 E3s and TGSes spring readily to mind), and TGS 2005 will probably prove to be no exception. The best of the old, and the first of the new -- hidden somewhere amidst the sound and the fury lies that elusive nugget of our collective gaming future, if we but possess the skills, foresight and knowledge to parse it. Trade shows are a singularly unique sensory experience; when one sits down to commune with a game, one is usually alone with it, not being assaulted from all angles by hundreds of other tempting options. We've done our best to process, digest, organize and interpret the images, the information, the sounds and the smells of Tokyo Game Show 2005. We hope you enjoy them.

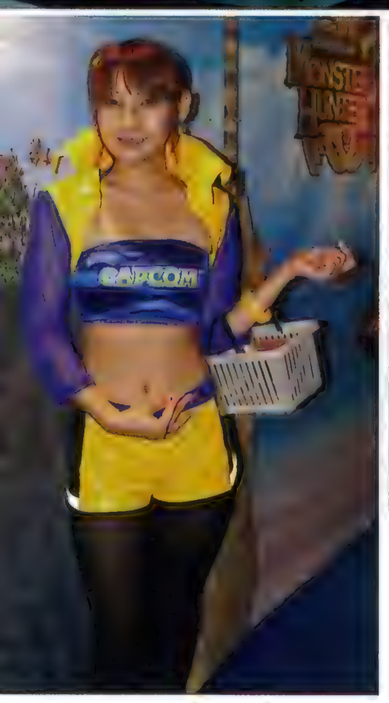
Top 5 surprises

1 Revolution Controller

Will it alienate hardcore gamers? Drive Nintendo further into their niche? Make Mom want to play video games? Usher in the next generation of interactive entertainment? Only time will tell. But was it a surprise? Oh yes. Oh yes indeed.

2 Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

Señor Snake. Metal Gear MkII from Snatcher. Best *confirmed-realtime* visuals ever seen in a video game. Kojima back at the helm. 'Nuff said.



COSPLAY MADNESS
Unlike American Cosplayers, Japan knows how it's done.

Top 10 playable demos

1. **Okami** PS2 **Capcom/Clover Studio**
2. **Soul Calibur III** PS2 **Bandai-Namco**
3. **Rogue Galaxy** PS2 **Sony/Level 5**
4. **Phantasy Star Universe** PS2/PC **Sega/Sonic Team**
5. **Kingdom Hearts II** PS2 **Square-Enix**
6. **Suikoden V** PS2 **Konami**
7. **Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII** PS2 **Square-Enix**
8. **Extreme Ghouls 'n' Ghosts** PSP **Capcom**
9. **Ryu Ga Gotoku** PS2 **Sega**
10. **Dead Rising** Xbox360 **Capcom**

Top 10 unplayable demos

1. **Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots** PS3 **Konami/Kojima Productions**
2. **Sonic the Hedgehog** PS3/Xbox360 **Sega/Sonic Team**
3. **Resident Evil 5** PS3/Xbox360 **Capcom**
4. **Dead Or Alive 4 -- Xbox360 -- Tecmo/Team Ninja**
5. **Final Fantasy XII -- PS2 -- Square-Enix**
6. **Vision Gran Turismo** PS3 **Sony/Polyphony Digital**
7. **Mobile Suit Gundam** PS3 **Bandai-Namco**
8. **Tengai Makyo ZIRIA: Harukanaru Zipang E** Xbox360 **Hudson**
9. **Final Fantasy XI: Online: Treasures of Aht Uhrgan** PS2/PC/Xbox360 **Square-Enix**
10. **Landstalker** PSP **Climax**

REVOLUTION CONTROLLER
Never underestimate Nintendo...

3 Microsoft's solid plan for Japan

Ol' Bill definitely seems to have learned for his mistakes. What do those crazy Japanese like? Sakaguchi-produced orthodox RPG(s)? Check. Dynasty Warriors clone? Check. Family board game? Check. A slimmer system profile? Um, sorta check. Still, it can't be argued the 360 will almost certainly do better here in the Land of the Rising Sun than the first 'Box did. How much better remains to be seen.

4 Legendary PS2 lineup

Take a look at our Top 10 Playable Demos... they're almost all PS2 games. Perhaps it's only logical that some of the finest games in a system's lineup come right at the end of it's life-cycle, and PS2 looks to be no exception. Titles like Shadow of the Colossus, Okami, and Soul Calibur III will more than keep you busy until the next generation arrives.

5 SOL!D EYE Tobidacid

We're not quite sure what to think about Kojima Productions's PSP doohickey, the "SOL!D EYE Tobidacid" (a pun on *tobidashi*, literally "jumping out"). So what exactly does it do? Strap it onto your system, peer through the stereo-optic lenses and play Metal Gear AC!D 2 in true 3-D. The effect is quite convincing, but is anyone really going to carry this behemoth around with them?

Top 5 disappointments

1 No playable PS3

Not a very big surprise, but still disappointing -- the only playable PS3s at the show were used by developers at stage events to show off games in realtime. I never thought I'd see the day that Microsoft stole Sony's thunder...in Japan, of all places.

2 Still no love for PSP

Where are the games? I predicted the PSP would grind DS into the dirt, and now I'm forced to consume fresh-baked humble pie by admitting the system I play most these days is, in fact...DS. This trend shows few signs of abating, as a positively *diaphanous* PSP lineup at TGS will attest. Shovelware ports to the system have to stop; original game development must begin. Titles like Extreme Ghouls 'n' Ghosts, Metal Gear AC!D 2, and EXIT are a step in the right direction.

3 Free Xbox360 HD in Japan for $50 less

What is Microsoft thinking? Not that I particularly begrudge the extra $50 Americans will have to pay for the "premium edition" of the 360 with hard-drive, it's the fact that everyone who purchases the system in Japan will have it standard. This could mean lots of Japan-only games that require a hard drive may never reach US shores.

4 No playable Final Fantasy XII

Directors stepping down, legions of key staff moving to Mistwalker, delayed for over a year -- is this game ever coming out? Yeah, it looks gorgeous, no complaints there. But it was playable at *last* year's E3. What gives?

5 Stingy PR people

Major Japanese game companies that shall remain unnamed refusing a press kit to a guy just 'cause he's from a foreign magazine. For shame.

Game of Show

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots PS3 **Konami/Kojima Productions**

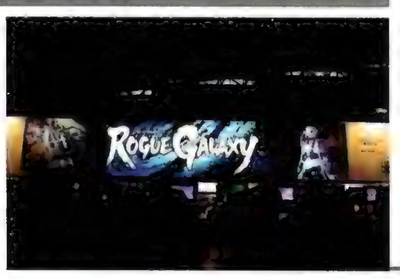
No, it wasn't playable, but if Game of Show means the single game that got us the most excited, it's Hideo Kojima's latest pièce de résistance. Señor Snake owns you.

See full preview on page 048

BOOTH HIGHLIGHTS TGS2005

Sony

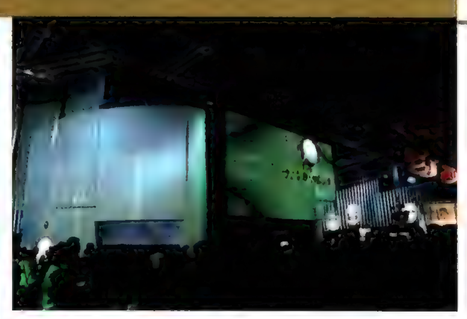
Despite devoting half their booth to a massive theater running video glimpses at many, many PS3 games (most of which were previously seen at E3 and/or PlayStation Meeting 2005), it was the current generation that really stood out. Sony had kiosks for every major PS2 game at the show set up, first and third-party alike, proving that it has the final days of the Sixth Era of video games wrapped up in a sweet-smelling package. Indeed, some of the most exciting PS2 games at the show are first/second party: Fumito Ueda's mesmerizing Shadow of the Colossus, Level 5 (Dark Cloud series, Dragon Quest VIII)'s brilliant-looking RPG Rogue Galaxy, and Polyphony Digital's "Gran Turismo with bikes", Tourist Trophy. PSP support was also robust -- as it had better be, considering it's Sony's platform. With quirky action games (Locoroco, Ghost in the Shell), the almost-certainly Japan-only automatic English-to-Japanese translator/study tool Talkman, and Monster Kingdom: Jewel Summoner, an RPG from former Shin Megami Tensei producer Cozy Okada, it's clear Sony's not yet ready to admit defeat to Nintendo's DS.



WHAT WAS HOT

- Shadow of the Colossus -- PS2 -- Sony
- Rogue Galaxy -- PS2 -- Sony/Level 5
- Tourist Trophy -- PS2 -- Sony/Polyphony Digital
- Vision Gran Turismo -- PS3 -- Sony/Polyphony Digital
- Genji 2 -- PS3 -- Sony/Game Republic
- Armored Core 4 -- PS3/Xbox360 -- From Software
- Assassin -- PS3 -- Ubisoft
- Ghost in the Shell -- PSP -- Sony
- Talkman -- PSP -- Sony
- Locoroco -- PSP -- Sony
- Monster Kingdom: Jewel Summoner -- PSP -- Sony/Gaia

Microsoft



WHAT WAS HOT

- [eM] -eNCHANT arM **Xbox360** From Software
- Ninety-Nine Nights **Xbox360** Microsoft/Q Entertainment/Phantagram
- Everyparty **Xbox360** Microsoft/Game Republic
- Wrestle Kingdom **Xbox360** Yuke's
- Kameo: Elements of Power **Xbox360** Microsoft/Rare
- Call of Duty 2 **Xbox360** Activision
- Test Drive Unlimited **Xbox360** Atari
- Need For Speed Most Wanted **Xbox360** Electronic Arts

First playable Xbox360 is in *Japan?* Has the world gone mad? Or has Microsoft finally learned how to play the game here? A glance at the 14 playable 360 games at the booth would seem to suggest the latter. Among certain-to-fail-in-Japan-despite-obvious-quality games like Kameo were several titles aimed directly at the Japanese market -- careful choices in tried-and-true genres by established creators. You've got your standard Final Fantasy-esque RPG ([eM]), your Dynasty Warriors *and* your Dynasty Warriors clone (Ninety-Nine Nights), your family board game (Everyparty), your MMORPG (FFXI), and your arcade racer (Ridge Racer 6). Despite these safe, tame choices and an incredibly ritzy booth, the scene at Microsoft was somewhat bleak. Nothing seemed to be getting a lot of attention from the Japanese gaming public -- even on the general admittance days a wait to play was usually not required. Perhaps this is nothing more than general ennui-fallout from the disastrous showing the original Xbox made in Japan, but Microsoft's future in Japan still remains a giant question mark.

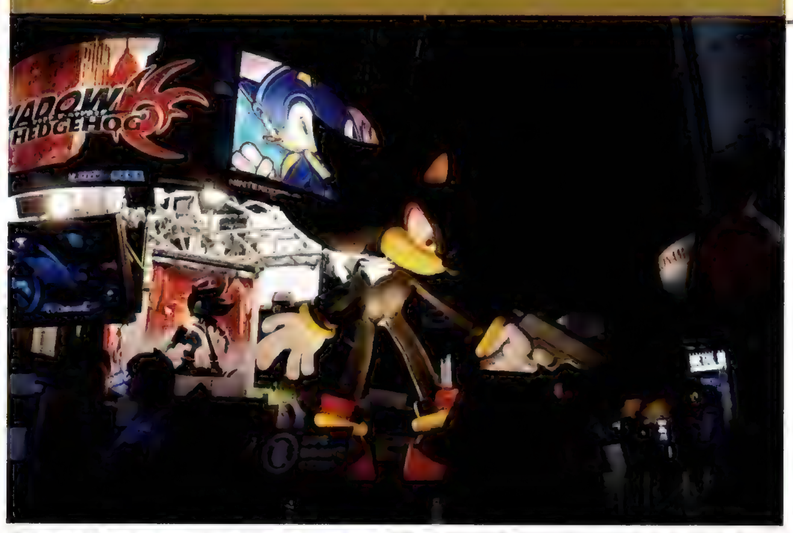
Konami

Like a white-hot platinum bullet to the brain, the MGS4 demonstration was the single most exciting thing at the show. Yes, it looks transcendent, yes, the themes and story are sure to be profound, the gameplay sublime -- but hey wait a second, it's *full-realtime!* How do we know for sure? Hideo Kojima took to the stage once daily to randomly pause the demo, move the camera around and play with the lighting at will. Dubious Killzone demo, step aside, for the true harbinger of PlayStation 3's ungodly power hath arrived. Sadly, the rest of Konami's TGS lineup was fairly bloodless, though Suikoden V with its lightning-quick battles and gorgeous presentation looks set to restore fans' faith in the series. Other highpoints included the impossibly well-proportioned rasslin' babes of Rumble Roses XX, Metal Gear AC!D 2 with its bizarre stereo-optic 3-D peripheral, and IGA's always-reliable Castlevanias.

WHAT WAS HOT

- Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots **PS3** Konami/Kojima Productions
- Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence **PS2** Konami/Kojima Productions
- Metal Gear AC!D 2 **PSP** Konami/Kojima Productions
- Rumble Roses XX **Xbox360** Konami
- Suikoden V **PS2** Konami
- Suikoden Tactics **PS2** Konami
- Suikoden I & II **PS2** Konami
- Castlevania: Curse of Darkness **PSs/Xbox** Konami
- Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow **DS** Konami

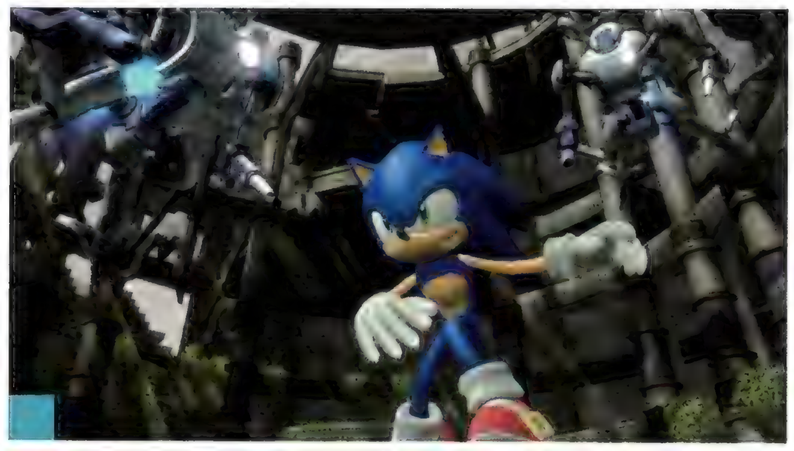
Sega

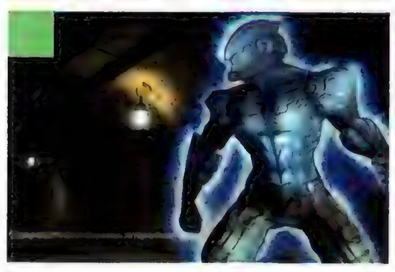


Is Sega's reliance on Yuji Naka getting a little scary, or is it just me? Almost half the prominent games at the booth are from The House That Built Sonic...not that you'll necessarily hear any complaints. Besides the sweeping majesty of the next-generation Sonic the Hedgehog, shown to the public for the first time, Sonic Team presented numerous toothsome offerings in the form of Sonic Riders, Phantasy Star Universe, Shadow the Hedgehog, and Sonic Rush. Additional PS3/360 love from Sega was slim, with only looks at slightly-further-along versions of Fifth Phantom Saga (FPS -- get it?) and Chrome Hounds on display. Current-gen software, however, was abundant, with the stunning-looking Shenmue-esque Yakuza adventure Ryu Ga Gotoku leading the pack. Quality handheld software was also evident; sign me up now for Treasure's 4-player DS fighter Bleach, and the sequel to last year's zany Feel the Magic: XX/YY.

WHAT WAS HOT

- Sonic the Hedgehog **PS3/Xbox360** Sega/Sonic Team
- Phantasy Star Universe **PS2/PC** Sega/Sonic Team
- Sonic Riders **PS2/GC/Xbox** Sega/Sonic Team
- Shadow the Hedgehog **PS2/GC/Xbox** Sega/Sonic Team
- Sonic Rush **DS** Sega/Sonic Team
- Fifth Phantom Saga **PS3** Sega
- Chrome Hounds **Xbox360** Sega/From Software
- Ryu Ga Gotoku -- PS2 -- Sega
- Sega Rally 2006 -- PS2 -- Sega
- Gunstar Super Heroes -- GBA -- Sega/Treasure
- Bleach **DS** Sega/Treasure
- Where Do Babies Come From? / Feel the Magic XX/YY 2 **DS** Sega
- Guilty Gear XX #Reload **PSP** Sega/Arc System Works



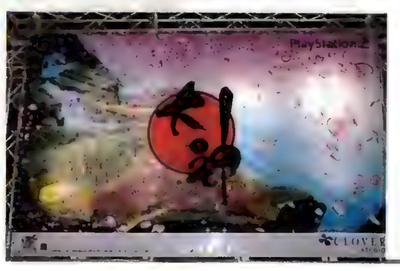


Capcom

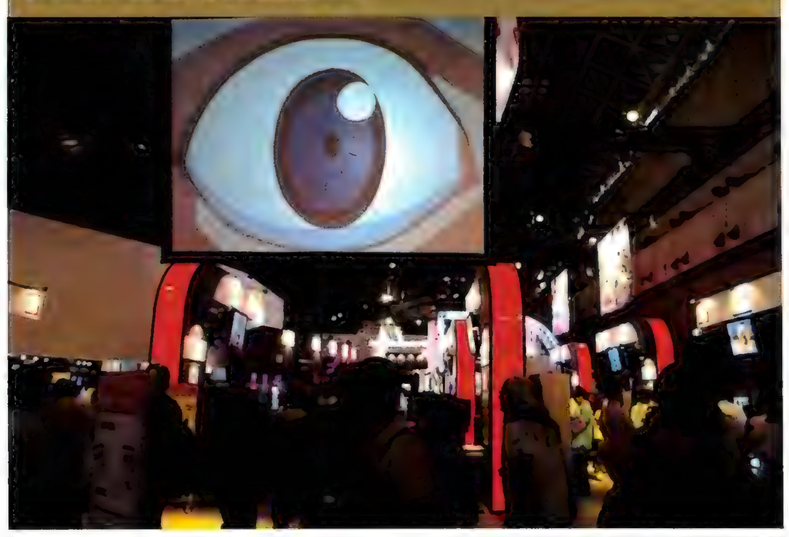
It's all about Okami. Though big-name franchises like Onimusha and Resident Evil commanded more floorspace, the mystical magic of Clover Studio's delirious sumi-e dream wafted throughout the crowd like the scent of joss sticks. The rest of Capcom's lineup was solid, if predictable. Shin Onimusha looks like more of the same (though without a real-life star providing the model for the hero), Beat Down is shaping up to be forgettable, and Resident Evil 4 is a port. Next-generation demos for Resident Evil 5 and Devil May Cry 4, though jaw-dropping, were clearly at the very earliest stages of development, and Dead Rising is in serious need of some optimization. Oddly enough the most exciting announcements came in the form of PSP games -- the long, long, *long*-awaited Ghouls 'n' Ghosts sequel, and fully polygonal remakes of the first entries in the Mega Man and Mega Man X series. If only other companies showed such love for the platform.

WHAT WAS HOT

- Okami **PS2** Capcom/Clover Studio
- Shin Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams **PS2** Capcom
- Beat Down **PS2/Xbox** Capcom
- Resident Evil 4 **PS2** Capcom
- Monster Hunter Dos **PS2** Capcom
- Resident Evil 5 **PS3/Xbox360** Capcom
- Dead Rising **Xbox360** Capcom
- Devil May Cry 4 **PS3** Capcom
- Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition **PS2** Capcom
- Extreme Ghouls 'n' Ghosts **PSP** Capcom
- Monster Hunter Portable **PSP** Capcom
- Viewtiful Joe Scratch! **PSP** Capcom
- Viewtiful Joe Battle Carnival **GC/PSP** Capcom
- Mega Man: Powered Up **PSP** Capcom
- Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X **PSP** Capcom
- Street Fighter Alpha 3 Double Upper **PSP** Capcom



Bandai-Namco



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WHAT WAS HOT

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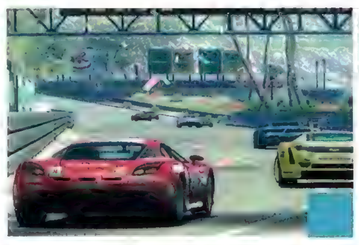
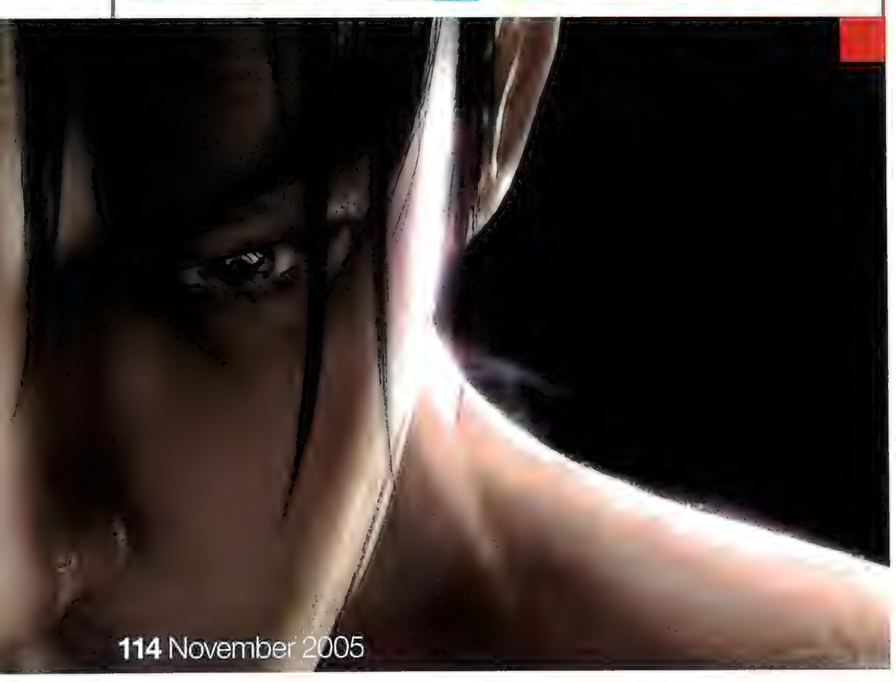
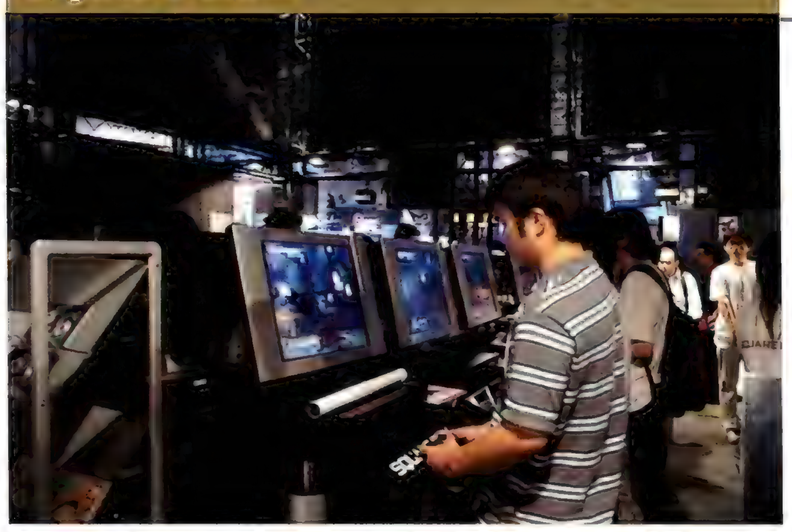
Ridge Racer 6 **Xbox360** Bandai-Namco
Mobile Suit Gundam **PS3** Bandai-Namco
New Fighting Game **PS3** Bandai-Namco
.hack//GU -- PS2 -- Bandai-Namco/Cyber Connect 2
Samurai Champloo **PS2** Bandai-Namco
Tales of the Abyss **PS2** Bandai-Namco
Xenosaga Episode III **PS2** Bandai-Namco/Monolith
Baten Kaitos II **GC** Bandai-Namco/Monolith
Boku no Watashi no Katamari Damacy **PSP** Bandai-Namco
E3: Every Extend Extra **PSP** Bandai-Namco/Q Entertainment
Xenosaga I & II **DS** Bandai-Namco/Monolith
Neon Genesis Evangelion 2 **PSP** Bandai-Namco





Square Enix



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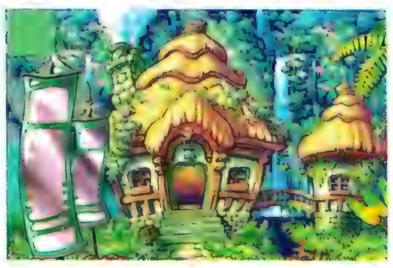
Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII **PS2** Square-Enix
Final Fantasy XII **PS2** Square-Enix
Final Fantasy XI: Online: Treasures of Aht Uhrgan **PS2/PC/Xbox360** Square-Enix
Code Age Commanders **PS2** Square-Enix
Mana Project **DS** Square-Enix



Tecmo

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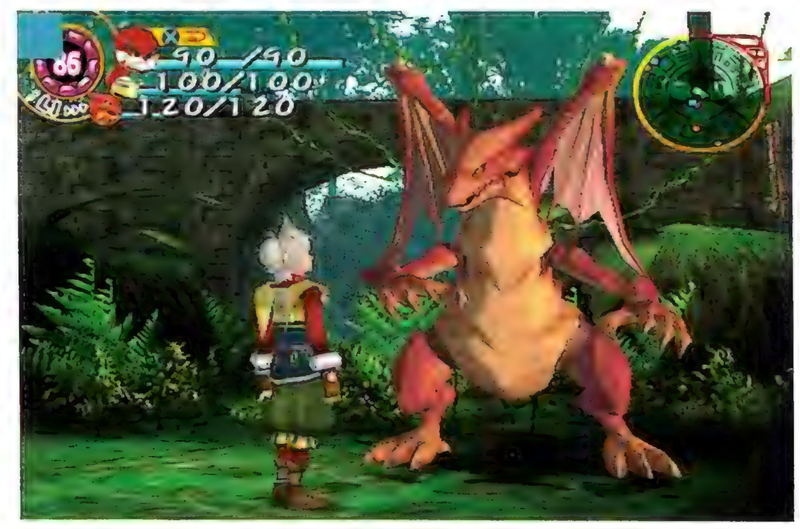
WHAT WAS HOT

Dead Or Alive 4 **Xbox360** Tecmo/Team Ninja
Ninja Gaiden Black **Xbox** Tecmo/Team Ninja
Karakuri **PSP** Tecmo
Monster Farm 5 **PS3** Tecmo
Tecmo Classic Arcade **Xbox** Tecmo



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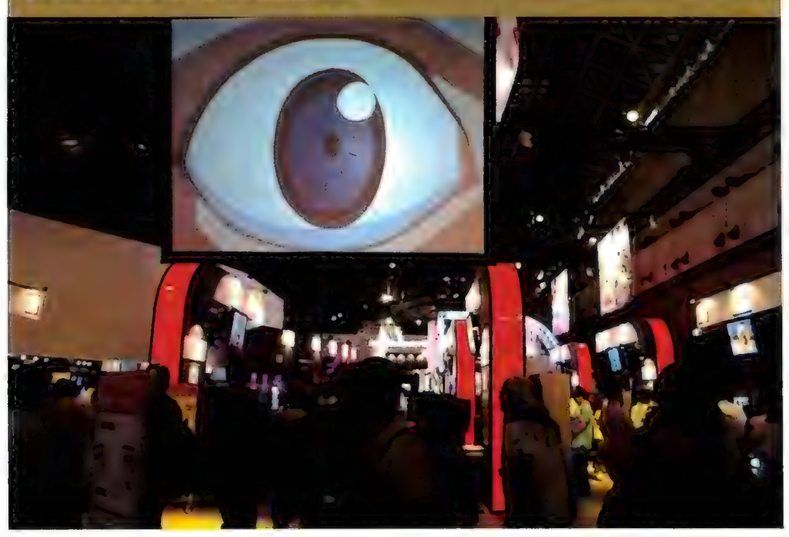

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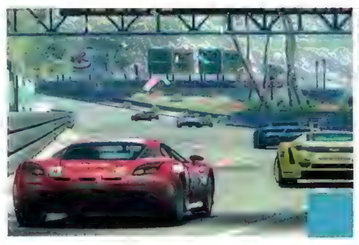

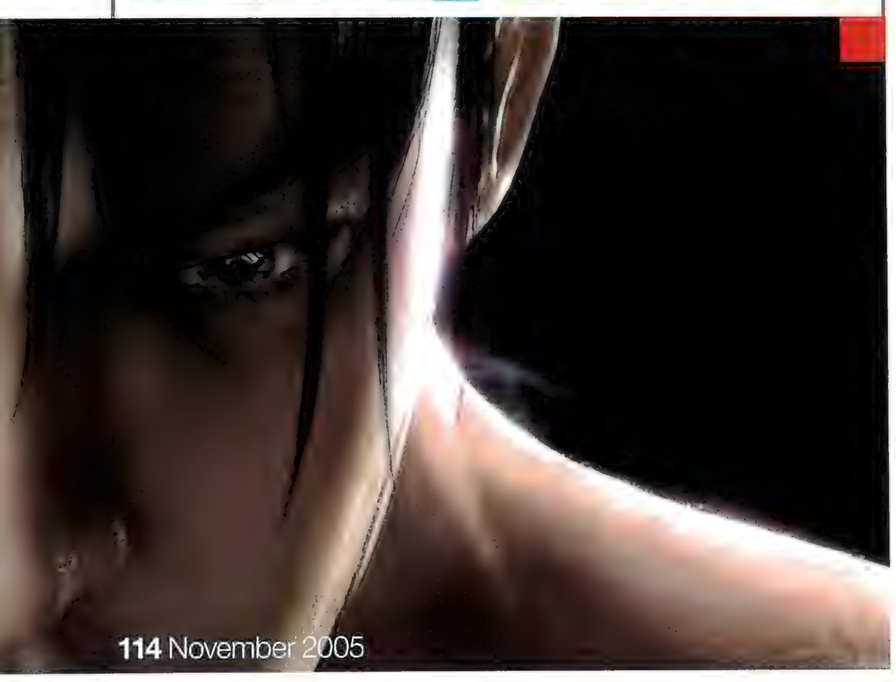

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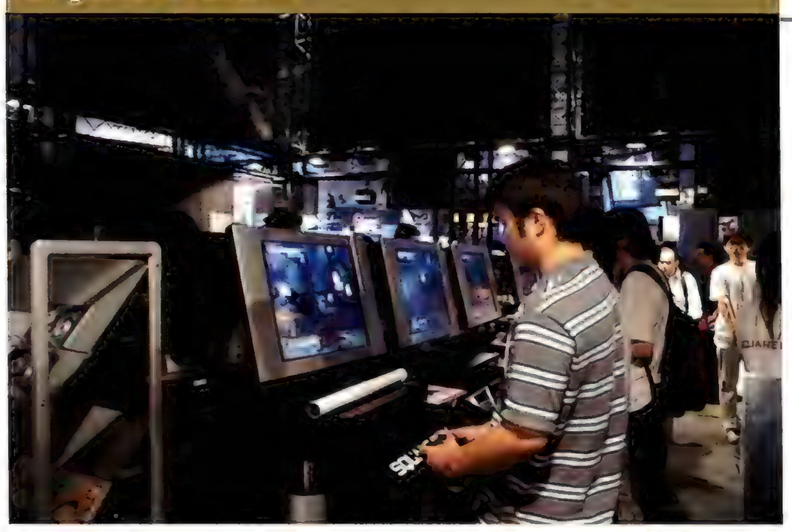

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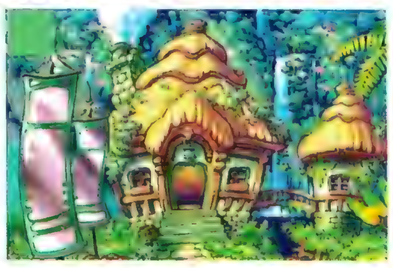

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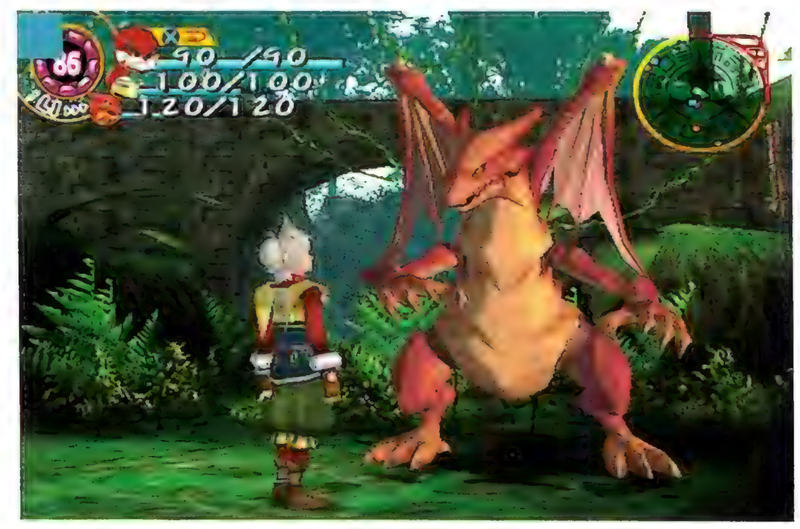


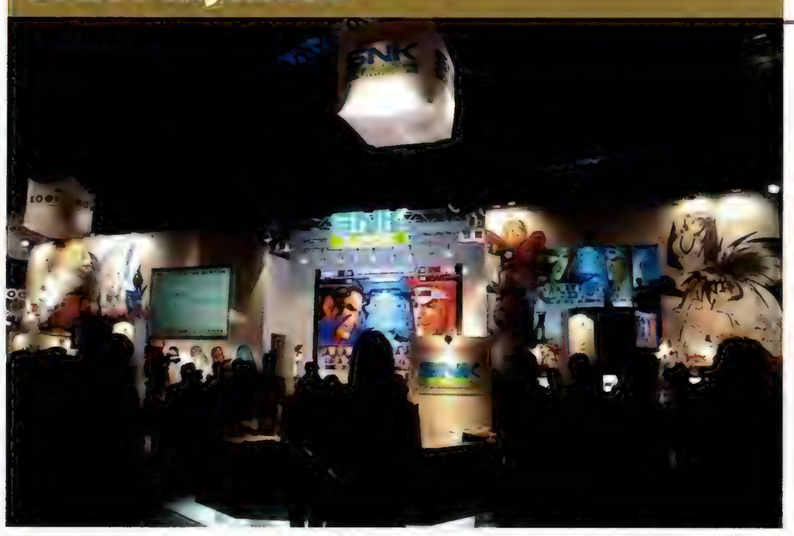
Koei

Arguably the strongest third-party next-gen showing at TGS. In addition to the previously announced Ni-Oh and Dynasty Warriors-derived "CG Concept Work" (unlikely to be used in an actual game, since Omega-Force has just announced their PS3 game as an all-new action game entitled Bladeforce), Koei also debuted the Canada-developed PS3 racer Fatal Intertia, looking quite spiffy in realtime, and had Dynasty Warriors 5 Special playable

WHAT WAS HOT

Fatal Intertia -- PS3 -- Koei/Omega-Force
CG Concept Work **PS3** Koei/Omega-Force
Dynasty Warriors 5 Special **Xbox360** Koei/Omega-Force
Ni-Oh **PS3** Koei
Samurai Warriors **PSP** Koei/Omega-Force

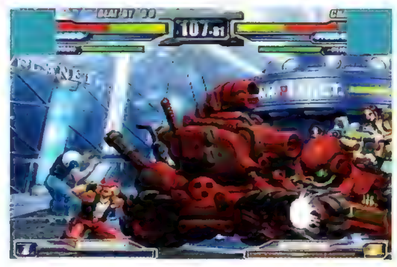
SNK Playmore



How much longer can this company continue to wring money out of its past? That was the question at SNK-Playmore's booth, featuring a massive display of ancient Shinkiro artwork and port upon port upon port of dated Neo-Geo fighters. Even its "new" games -- Neo-Geo Battle Coliseum and Samurai Spirits Tenkaichi Kenkyakuden -- make heavy use of recycled sprites from the Neo-Geo era. At least KOF Maximum Impact 2 could be considered a step in the right direction.

WHAT WAS HOT

King of Fighters Maximum Impact 2 **PS2** SNK-Playmore
Neo-Geo Battle Coliseum **PS2** SNK-Playmore
Samurai Spirits Tenkaichi Kenkyakuden **PS2** SNK-Playmore



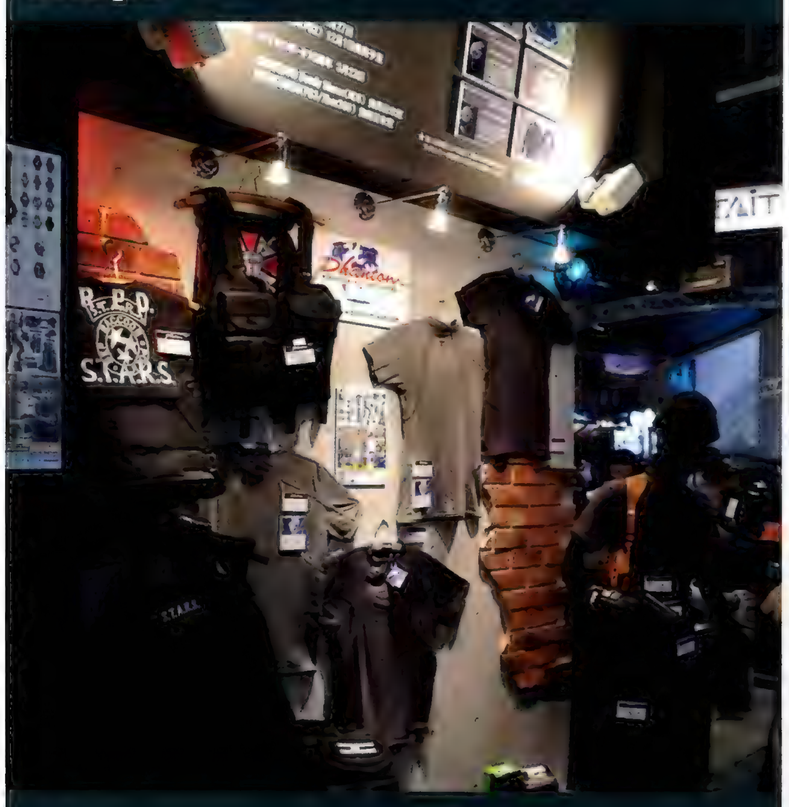
Taito

Taito, recently acquired by Square-Enix, proved it still exists with a sparse display of flight sim World Airforce on Xbox360, and the very promising stylized action game EXIT on PSP.

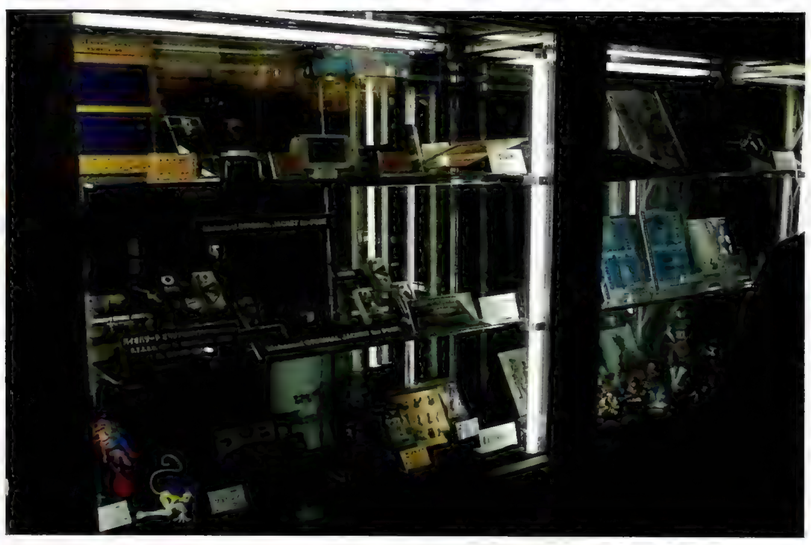
WHAT WAS HOT

World Airforce **Xbox360** Taito
EXIT **PSP** Taito

Shops



Shops? At a trade show? You'd better believe it. Seeing as how TGS is a *public* trade show, game companies waste no time setting up kiosks full of mouthwatering licensed products to bilk poor attendees out of their cash. Though actual game software is not sold, goods are, and in profusion. Selections range from plush Dragon Quest Slimes to replicas of accessories worn by Final Fantasy characters, cast in solid silver and costing hundreds of dollars.



Interviews

Interview #01

Developer: Sonic Team **Game:** Sonic Riders **Person:** Takashi Yuda

Interview by Nick Des Barres / Transcribed by Dai Kohama / Translated by Nick Des Barres

Mr. Yuda has been at Sega since 1990. He worked on all Sega-produced Disney Genesis games, and has been part of the Sonic series since 3. During the Saturn era he was involved in motion capture experimentation, and has since worked on titles as varied as Space Channel 5 and Puyo Puyo.

play: As a big fan of Sonic R on the Saturn, the first thing I noticed about Riders was the highlighted "R" in the logo. Does Riders share any connection with that game?
Takashi Yuda: No, not really. There had been a request from Sega for a new Sonic racing game, and in Japan the addition of an "R" to racing games is quite common. There's no important meaning behind the highlighted "R" in Riders.

So we won't be hearing any crazy vocal tunes then?
Not this time! You might hear a few keywords used as vocals here and there, but for Riders we're concentrating on conventional, upbeat race music.

I see -- so Riders is an entirely new vision. What kind of game can we expect? Straight-ahead racing, or more focus on inter-character combat?
It's a racing game at its core. But having said that, all characters in spinoff racing games often control exactly the same. For Riders, we're trying to make each character play uniquely and stay true to their Sonic roots, so action is also very important. For instance, the Turbulence System -- the main concept behind Sonic Riders -- when someone hits 180KPH, they create a wave of turbulence resembling a halfpipe behind them, which you can ride on, jump off of, and perform tricks on to catch up to your rivals. It's inspired by real racing techniques like utilizing a rival's slipstream.

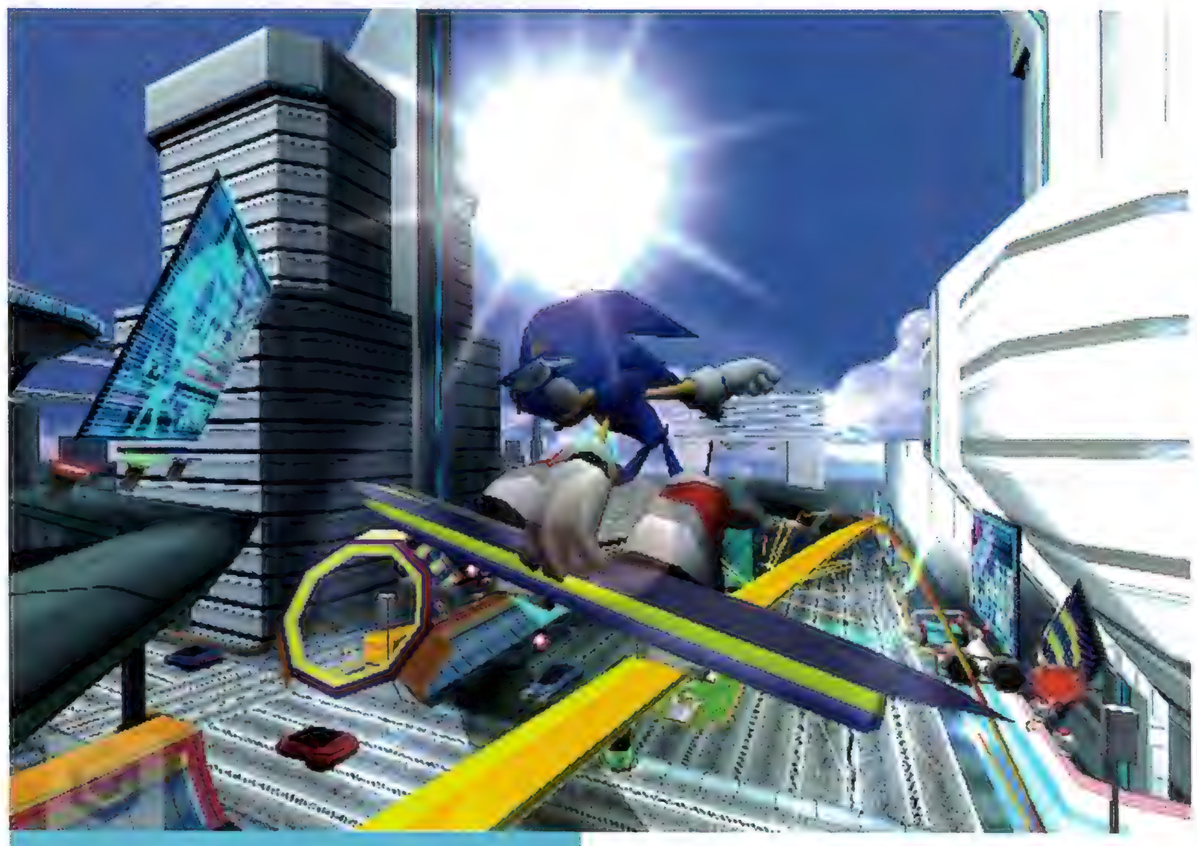
So the action elements aren't just a bonus -- they're an integral part of the game system.
That's right. You can catch up to whomever's ahead of you, but when you speed up you'll create your own wave of turbulence, which might be turned right back on you, creating a neck-and-neck effect.

Tell us more about the Turbulence System -- what's the gauge on the right side of the screen, for instance?
That's the Air Gauge. Put simply it's kind of like fuel. You can use it to perform maneuvers like dash and turbo, and to fill it back up you must perform tricks. Of course, the fancier your trick, the more spins it has, the more Air you'll charge. Also if you land properly from a trick you get a temporary boost of speed, so you'll be wanting to perform as many as you can. We think this element in particular sets Sonic Riders apart from other character-based racing games in terms of originality.

And the boards all the characters are riding? How do they work?
They work like the hoverboard in Back to the Future II (laughs). We've prepared about 40 boards total, which will gradually become available to the player as the game progresses. As I just said, the Air Gauge acts as their fuel, and should it run out entirely you'll get off the board and actually run on the track (laughs). There are places to restore your Air, but mainly you'll have to perform tricks to keep your gauge full. We're working on the balance so this will be fun and not tedious -- you won't have to be constantly worrying about your gauge.

What about the tracks themselves? Will we see a lot of classic Sonic-style loops and Moebius strips?
Of course, it's Sonic! Plenty of loops. There's a huge amount of tracks available to play on, too.

Are they totally linear, or are there shortcuts, hidden ways of getting the one-up on your opponents?
There are. You won't be able to just find them yourself, though, you'll have to use an opponent's turbulence to jump really far, for instance.



"For Riders, we're trying to make each character play uniquely and stay true to their Sonic roots, so action is also very important."

It's hard not to notice a lack of old-school Sonic characters in the announced playable lineup so far -- nearly half are new and all the old characters are heroes. Will we see villians like Shadow and Mecha Sonic return?
Yes, you will -- but we're placing a lot of emphasis on the story this time, so only characters that fit within the concept.

Emphasis on the story...in a racing game? Intriguing!
Well, it's still Sonic Vs. Eggman (laughs). The race is just a cover story for Eggman and a band of three thieves calling themselves Babylon, who are sort of manipulating him. The player will uncover the various mysteries behind these new characters and Eggman as the game progresses. I'll give you a hint, it involves a Chaos Emerald!

So the three new characters are villains? Can you choose them right from the start and see the story from the other side?
Not from the start. First you have to beat the game as Sonic, then as Tails, etc., to unlock them.

How many unlockable characters are you planning?
There are seven characters available from the start, so about ten extra hidden. Some don't have a story, however, and will only be playable in certain modes. Like the boards, you'll unlock them by performing various tasks and reaching certain goals.

Finally I'd like to ask a hardware question -- like most recent Sonic games, Riders is coming out on three platforms simultaneously. How do you manage to develop for three systems at once?
A: Well, development begins on one platform only, and proceeds on that platform until the game is good and ready, so it's not really that difficult at all. It's not as if we're building the game from the ground up on three platforms. As far as Sonic Riders is concerned, it's now up and running on all three consoles.

Interview #02

Developer: Treasure **Game:** Gunstar Super Heroes **Person:** Masato Maegawa

Interview by Nick Des Barres & Dai Kohama / Transcribed by Dai Kohama / Translated by Nick Des Barres

Mr. Maegawa began his career at Konami as a programmer, where he worked on Game Boy, NES, and SNES games, eventually becoming a director. After three years at the company he left to create Treasure, debuting in 1993 with the one-two punch of McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure and Gunstar Heroes on Genesis.

play: Treasure fans have been begging for a Gunstar Heroes sequel for twelve years. Why was now the right time?
Masato Maegawa: There are really two reasons. The first is that I would not make a sequel without the original staff. All of the people who worked on Gunstar are now able to direct their own games, and are almost always doing separate projects. It just so happened we all had a break in our schedules, and now was the time. Second, doing things our own way is sort of Treasure's style. We all had to agree on doing a new game, without any pressure from above.

So the original Gunstar and Super Heroes have exactly the same staff? That's unheard of!
Not exactly the same (laughs). We made the original with seven people including myself, and Super Heroes with six of those seven.

Gunstar Super Heroes shares a lot with its predecessor in terms of feeling and stage design -- do you consider it a remake, or a sequel?
Oh, it's an entirely new game. It's not as if we're re-using graphics, or anything. There are lots of places that are intentionally reminiscent of the original, and many that are not. So you could think of it as a sequel, certainly.

Why "Super", then? Why not Gunstar Heroes 2?
Hmm, mainly because it's different hardware. The theme of Super Heroes is "exhilaration." While we're keeping popular elements from the original like giant effects and multi-jointed bosses, the main concept behind Super Heroes is surpassing the original in every way. I think we've achieved that, and so by that logic it must be Super (laughs). By sticking a "2" on the title, we'd be saying to the world, "This is our sequel to Gunstar Heroes." I don't personally consider it a sequel.

It certainly is different hardware. The GBA is sort of known as a children's platform, and Treasure is known for their mindbendingly difficult games. How are you bringing those two disparate elements together?
Our core target is still hardcore gamers, so in Hard Mode especially, you'll definitely get a classic Treasure challenge. But don't worry, we're still thinking about the children (laughs). There's an Easy Mode, of course, and since the default control styles are a bit complex, we've added an Auto Mode with auto fire, so you can beat the game with just jumping.

Control styles? Separate from the difficulty setting? How many are there?
We wanted to make a game that anybody could play, so there are four -- two simple control schemes, and two reminiscent of the original.

How would you compare development between GBA and Genesis? Which was more difficult?
They're really similar actually (laughs). There are things we can do on the GBA that weren't possible on the Genesis and vice-versa. Our concept for Super Heroes was to take this extremely limited hardware, the GBA, and struggle to push it beyond those limits. It wasn't about, "How can we use this hardware feature?", but rather, "How can we use this hardware feature for something nobody's ever thought of?"

Sort of a fannish question, but I'm looking at the poster art right now, and this doesn't look like Han (ed. note -- character designer for Gunstar Heroes, Guardian Heroes, Radiant Silvergun, etc. etc.). Is it someone new?
You have a sharp eye (laughs)! The base character design is by Han, but for the actual art we wanted to raise the quality a bit so a different designer's touched it up a bit and done the coloring. I know it looks substantially different from his past stuff, but it's still Han.

So are this Red and Blue the same characters that were in the original?
Not exactly (laughs). We decided not to use anything from the original -- no graphics, no character designs. We purposely didn't look back at the first game, and asked ourselves, "What kind of game was Gunstar?" If we've done our jobs right everything will look familiar, but new.

We're definitely looking forward to it. What else is Treasure working on for Sega at the moment?
Right now we're doing a fighting game based on the manga/anime Bleach for the Nintendo DS. It's similar to a game we did on Megadrive called Yu Yu Hakusho, if you remember that.

Four players simultaneously?
Exactly. You'll be able to play four players at the TGS.

Can't wait to see it. Now let's talk about 2-D versus 3-D for a moment...do you see 2-D as fading away with the next generation of hardware, becoming viable only on handheld platforms?
Not at all. Personally, I want to make games with at least a 2-D control scheme for the rest of my life. We really don't have the desire to do any completely 3-D games. That doesn't mean we won't use 3-D graphics, of course -- on a high-spec system, even if the backgrounds and characters are polygons, we'll keep the core gameplay in two dimensions. To give you an example, in a fighting game, if you have two characters dueling on a 2-D plane, no problem, right? Start adding extra characters and planes and it gets distracting. For action titles, running around aimlessly in huge 3-D environments just isn't my idea of gameplay. At Treasure we make games: gameplay comes before graphics. Many, many titles in the past have made the mistake of reversing this priorty. At the end of the day 2-D would have been the right choice. I'm not saying it's the *best* choice, but it's often the only choice.

"Our core target is still hardcore gamers, so in Hard Mode especially, you'll definitely get a classic Treasure challenge."

That's a Treasure quote for the ages. While we're sort of on the subject of the past, any plans for more handheld remakes/sequels/ports? Dynamite Headdy? Silhouette Mirage? Sin & Punishment?
Not at the moment. In the case of Headdy I was the lead programmer on that game, and since I no longer program I don't think we'll ever revisit it. I don't think anyone else could understand that code (laughs). With Sin & Punishment we're sorry American fans never got a chance to play it, and we're always talking with Nintendo about how we'd like to do another game, but I don't think it's very suited to handheld play. I'm not totally ruling out any more handheld versions of past Treasure games, though.

What about shooters? We know Radiant Silvergun and Ikaruga were planned as parts one and two of a trilogy -- will we ever get to see the final installment?
They are part of a trilogy, and the basic ideas for the third one are there. The only problem is, when are we going to be able to make it (laughs)? Our staff is comparatively tiny, so we're only able to do one original game every two or so years. Please be patient (laughs).

We'll try! Finally, if you have a word for American Treasure fans...
We're mostly known for our action games, so we probably have more American fans than Japanese. Please look forward to Gunstar Super Heroes!

Interview #03

Developer: Konami TYO **Game:** Rumble Roses XX **Person:** Akari Uchida

Interview by Nick Des Barres / Transcribed by Dai Kohama / Translated by Nick Des Barres

Mr. Uchida started his career making PC office software, and joined Konami in 1995. Until recently he has worked mainly on games targeting the Japan market only. Rumble Roses for PS2 was his first major worldwide title.

play: The original Rumble Roses was for PS2. Why make the jump to 360, rather than wait for PS3?
Akari Uchida: Why? Because Microsoft gave us lots of money (laughs)! No, I'm kidding, that's just a joke. No, it's really a joke, I swear (laughs). Basically we just wanted to use new hardware. For the first Rumble Roses, it was a tough decision between making the most beautiful models possible, or adding a tag mode. Since that game has been released we've gotten a bit of criticism about the lack of tagging, so we wanted to bring that feature to the fans as fast as possible. And, well, the Xbox 360 comes out first, so (laughs)...

So is this more of an update to the original Rumble Roses, rather than a sequel?
Other than the characters and general controls, it's all new. The models, the motions, the backgrounds -- everything's been redone from top to bottom. It was a necessity, since the power of the 360 demands models of a quality roughly equivalent to what we used to use for prerendered cutscenes on PS2. For instance, each character in XX uses about 50,000 polygons. That's five times what we were using in the first Rumble Roses. It cost a lot of money (laughs).

Can we expect new characters?

Hmm...I can't say there won't be any new characters at all, but we're not really thinking about it right now. In the first game your character could become a face or a heel, and in XX we've added a third mode, Superstar, for all ten characters. Superstar mode comes in both face and heel flavors, by the way. Your costumes and attacks will change, so it's basically like having double the characters. I think it should feel pretty fresh.

While we're on the subject of characters, it was just announced that Reiko from Rumble Roses is going to be a playable character in Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence. Might we see some cross-promotion here? EVA appearing as a wrestler in XX for example...?
Well...Mr. Kojima's asked me not to say anything yet so my lips are sealed (laughs). Sort of unrelated, but you remember Lady X Substance from the original? This time there's a Lady X Subsistence (laughs).

Getting back to the hardware, Rumble Roses is known for perhaps the best in-game models of the female form ever seen. How are you using the 360 to improve them?
The new technology allows us to do some really amazing things, especially with muscle movement, expansion and contraction. Also the texture resolution has increased dramatically so we're able to add tiny skin details and such. We're no longer able to cheat with anime-style exaggeration or deformation, so the models have also become a lot more realistic.

How far do you think you've pushed the Xbox360? Is there still room to grow, more to learn?
Of course. This is our first game out of the gate, so I wouldn't presume to say we're using the hardware at full spec. However, we're

"Other than the characters and general controls, it's all new. The models, the motions, the backgrounds -- everything's been redone from top to bottom."

developing the game in consultation with technical experts from Microsoft, and we're both pretty satisfied with how it's turning out. Some of the other next-generation demos I've been seeing lately are kind of suspicious -- is it real-time? Is it prerendered? I can tell you we're full real-time, but you can't really compare such things (laughs).

How will you be able to use Xbox Live with the game?
You'll be able to fight tag-match style online. This is something I've really always dreamed about, a kind of virtual arcade. It's very exciting.

Will both Silver and Gold users be able to play?
Of course. No restrictions.

One of our favorite things about the first game was the funky Story Mode. Are you expanding it for XX?
Well...we...we got a lot of complaints about Story Mode from America so we cancelled it (laughs)!

What? No! Everyone loved it!
Don't worry, there's plenty of new modes to take its place (laughs).

What about the Mad Mud matches?
The mud wrestling was fun, but didn't really add anything to the game, so we passed on it. Again, trust me, we've got better stuff planned this time (laughs). I can't really say anything more yet but...we're preparing a new mode called Queen's Match that I think will be very popular. Please look forward to it!

No Story mode? No Mad Mud? Queen's Match had better be 2 on 2!
What should I say...it's sort of a mode where

terms like 1 on 1 and 2 on 2 don't mean anything anymore (laughs). If I told you what it was I know you'd really get excited about it. Just wait a little longer (laughs)!

What other new modes are you planning?
Lots (laughs). For example...the guys at Yuke's, our co-developers, were talking like, "Wouldn't it be fun to see these girls in a Tekken-style game?" Well, they went and made it (laughs). It seems they were getting bored with just making wrestling games, so they created new attacks with fast, Tekken-style motions, set a fixed camera and a one-minute timer like a standard fighting game. But we didn't want it to be like most fighting games where you have to learn several pages of moves to even start playing, so you can also use the familiar controls from the main mode. It's still in development so I can't say much more, but it's going to be a lot of fun. "If we're going Tekken-style," I said, "you gotta add a bear and a panda (laughs!)" No, I'm not joking! They'll be in there. We're through with the comparisons to DOA, next we're taking on Tekken (laughs)!

What about character customization? That was a feature that would have added a lot to the original.
Oh boy...then you'll be very happy to see...no, I can't really talk about it yet but it's going to be awesome (laughs)! I hope when people see our character customization, they'll be like, "Oh man, that's so Rumble Roses!"

Looking forward to it! Finally, if you have anything to say to your American fans...
We added tag matches so buy Rumble Roses XX! No more excuses (laughs)!

Interview #05

Developer: Konami TYO **Game:** Suikoden Tactics & Suikoden V **Person (s):** Junko Kawano, Noritada Matsukawa & Osamu Komuta

Interview by Nick Des Barres & European press / Transcribed by Dai Kohama / Translated by Nick Des Barres

Miss Kawano has been with the Suikoden series since I, for which she acted as character designer. She has since released the critically-acclaimed PS2 adventure game, Shadow of Destiny, and produced/directed/wrote/character-designed Suikoden IV. Mr. Matsukawa is the general producer for the Suikoden series, and Mr. Komuta is the director of Suikoden Tactics.

Play: We know Suikoden Tactics takes place in the setting of IV, the Island Nations, but does it come before or after in the chronology?
Kawano: The game begins before the events of IV, and ends after its conclusion. It's really long (laughs).

Play: So will you be able to import save data from IV?
Kawano: Yes. There will be special rewards for people who've played IV.

European press: Are you totally satisfied with the results of Suikoden Tactics?
Kawano: Hmm...we're really tired (laughs). Yes, we think we did our absolute best.

European press: IV was not that successful...do you think you'll be able to recapture the market with this different style of gameplay in Tactics?
Matsukawa: This time the genre is strategy simulation, so we really concentrated on making a great battle system, something which is new for the series. I hope people enjoy it.

Kawano: It's sort of experimental.

Konami liaison: I have a question for you, if you don't mind...why do you think IV was not that successful? We consider it a success.

European press: I don't know, maybe people were expecting too much...

Play: I think people may have been expecting a sequel to I, II and III, rather than a prequel.
Konami liaison: Ah.

Play: The character designs for Tactics don't seem to be by Miss Kawano. Are they a new illustrator?
Kawano: No, they're by me (laugh). I purposely changed my style for Tactics, to fit in with the new feeling and genre.

Play: Miss Kawano, I'm a huge personal fan of yours and even I couldn't tell you drew this (refers to Tactics cover illustration). This is your art??
Kawano: It's kind of an experimental style. I wonder what Suikoden fans will think (laughs).

European press: What was the most difficult aspect of production for Tactics?
Komuta: The game system. We'd never done a strategy game before, so it was fairly difficult. From a technical perspective, we were really able to push the limits of the hardware, with 30 to 40 different characters on screen at once.

Play: Do you ever get worried that the dense Suikoden backstory might be shutting out new users?
Kawano: With Tactics, while knowledge of the previous games will certainly enchance your experience, it's not necessary. You can definitely enjoy it as is.

Play: How much can we ask about V? I think the thing Suikoden fans are most anxious to hear about is where it comes in the timeline...is it another prequel, or a sequel to I, II and III?
Kawano: That's the real question, isn't it (laughs)?

Matsukawa: That's a little bit too central to be talking about just yet (laughs).

Konami liaison: What would be your guess (laughs)?

Play: I would guess it takes place close to I, II and III even if it's not a sequel. When one thinks of the Queendom of Falena (ed. note -- announced setting for V) popular characters like Killey and Lorelai come to mind, and then there's the issue of Georg...
Matsukawa: Well...people who know that much about Suikoden, we won't be betraying them. I can't tell you when it takes place yet, though (laughs). We wouldn't set the game in Falena without a good reason to.

Play: What about Yuber and Pesmerga? Will we ever get to see their final conflict?
Matsukawa: That's one of many Suikoden subplots we're going to come back to eventually, dealing with them one at a time. For example the issue of Georg, the regicide. You'll get to see that episode in V.

"It's been ten years since the first Suikoden, it's the tenth anniversary, so we want to challenge the new."

European press: If this game is a success would you consider more strategy games in the series?
Matsukawa: Tactics is sort of like the culmination of the Suikoden series's battle system. If people like it we'll definitely continue.

Play: Who are the scenario writer and character designer for V? This time I'm positive it isn't Miss Kawano's work (laughs).
Matsukawa: That's top secret (laughs). We'll be announcing them soon.

Play: Might the story be by Yoshitaka Murayama...? (Ed. note -- Creator of the Suikoden series and author of I, II and III. Left Konami in 2001 to form Blue Moon Studio, a game scenario-writing company.)
Matsukawa: Well...he's not with Konami any more, so (laughs)...

European press: What is it like for Miss Kawano, being a woman in the game industry?
Kawano: Things have changed a lot. In the past a woman in the game industry was almost heretical, but now there are many more female gamers, and consequently a lot more women coming into the industry.

European press: What are your thoughts on how women are depicted in games themsleves?
Kawano: I don't think it's that much different from what men think (laughs). When I see a sexy, powerful female game character, I just think, "that's cool!" For me personally, there's never really been a case when it was, "that's too much!", or "that's just gross!"

Play: For IV the concept was, "returning to the series's roots." What would you say the theme, or concept of V will be?
Matsukawa: It's been ten years since the first Suikoden, it's the tenth anniversary, so we want to challenge the new. Hence strategy. Hence changing the style of the art. The game experience of V itself will be quite original, I think. V will also be very experimental for the series, for instance we're totally changing the look of the characters. For the users who want nostalgia, we're releasing I & II on PSP.

European press: Now that the development of Tactics is complete, what aspect of the game would you say you're most satisfied with?

Komuta: I'll just be happy if people who play the game come back to us with, "it was fun!"

Matsukawa: The reviews in Japan are already very good. We're quite satisfied.

Play: Finally, if you have a word for American Suikoden fans...
Matsukawa: For Tactics we really put all our efforts into making a great battle system. Suikoden fans aren't going to want to miss it. For V, in addition to a new battle system we've completely overhauled the design. I hope people have fun with them both.

Kawano: I think this new battle system and style of play will be appreciated worldwide. Please do play Suikoden Tactics if you get the chance.

Komuta: We really put our all into the battle system this time. Tactics is also quite long and packed with hidden features, while at the same time retaining that core "Suikoden-ness." Please enjoy it.

Interview #06

Developer: Q Entertainment / Phantagram **Game:** Ninety-Nine Nights **Person(s):** Tetsuya Mizuguchi & Sangyoun Lee

Interview by Assorted Members of the International Press / Transcribed by Nick Des Barres / Translated by nobody because Mr. Mizuguchi speaks fluent English

Mr. Mizuguchi (above left) joined Sega in 1990, where he produced arcade games such as Sega Rally, Sega Touring Car Championship, and Manx TT Superbike. He later moved on to consumer software development where he created the Space Channel 5 series and Rez. He left Sega to establish Q Entertainment in 2003, and has since released the handheld puzzle games Meteos and Lumines to much acclaim.

Mr. Lee (above right)founded Seoul-based Phantagram in 1994, where his first project was an action game for PC called Blade Warrior. Phantagram's first worldwide success was with the 1999 Kingdom Under Fire, which has since become a franchise on PC and Xbox.

Ninety-Nine Nights represents the first collaboration between Q and Phantagram.

Q: How did the collaboration between Q and Phantagram come about?
Lee: Microsoft introduced Q and Phantagram. While we were discussing a possible Xbox360 version of Kingdom Under Fire, they suggested, why not work together? Mr. Mizuguchi and I have a very similar vision of games, our ideas are very similar. Mr. Mizuguchi isn't just looking at the Japanese market; he's very open to the world. Cooperation has been very smooth. I'm very happy working with Q.

Mizuguchi: Yeah, I'm happy too!

Q: This game is very different from Mr. Mizuguchi's past works, whether it be Sega Rally or Lumines. Have you been able to bring elements from these titles into the action genre?
Mizuguchi: I don't care about genre. It's not complicated, it's very simple...I care about what is fun. A good game should have a good balance between what's physical and emotional. That's all that matters.

Play: I'm curious about how development duties are being shared between Q and Phantagram.
Mizuguchi: Q Entertainment is responsible for the storyline, game concept, and world concept. Phantagram is actually making the game -- game design, level design, the programming technologies. They're a great studio with very powerful programmers, great art skills. It's really good chemistry.

Play: Do you see yourselves working on future projects together?
Mizuguchi: Yeah, I hope so.

Lee: We're thinking about developing a music game together, too.

Q: This new intro showing at TGS showcases the individual player characters from Ninety-Nine Nights for the first time, and has opened up a lot of curiosity -- what can you elaborate on at this point about them?

Mizuguchi: You can play seven characters total. At TGS we've announced six characters, but one of them is still secret -- we're keeping it a secret until launch day. I think it'll be a big surprise. Five of the characters are human beings, and two are other races (ed. note -- which means the secret character will not be human). Everyone has justice in this world. Everyone has family, friends, their own fate. Everyone is thinking, what is justice? Why do we have to fight each other? Especially the playable character at TGS, Inphyy -- she lost her father to goblin soldiers when she was very young, about seven. But the goblin soldier you can play had his brother killed by humans, too. It's kind of a chain. Everyone is thinking about the future of society -- their society, their family and friends. Movies can only show a story from one point of view, usually from the side of "justice". Human beings hate war, but we can't seem to stop it. Why? I've always wanted to put this kind of element into a game, and now, finally, with this high-def technology it's possible. We can now introduce highly emotional aspects into a game, not just physical pleasure.

Play: So you'll be able to see the story of Ninety-Nine Nights from multiple angles.
Mizuguchi: That's right, yeah. Each character has their own perspective, their own story. Sometimes they'll encounter each other -- for example one of the other player characters might tempt you, go here, go there. But you have to decide for yourself. It's your future.

Play: The story is non-linear?
Mizuguchi: No, I'd say it's linear. The story itself is linear, although depending on your choices some characters have multiple endings.

Q: Is this primarily a one-player experience? Are you planning any network multi-player features?
Mizuguchi: Well, we haven't decided yet, but we're being very aggressive about it. We'll definitely have Xbox Live features, whether it's downloads or whatever, but we haven't worked out the details yet.

Play: I remember Mr. Lee back at E3 saying the goal was to have 2,000 enemies on screen at once. Have you met that goal yet?
Lee: In this build we have 1,000 characters on screen, but yes, we still expect the final version to have 2,000.

Mizuguchi: So that means twice what you see here (laughs). They're still optimizing.

"Human beings hate war, but we can't seem to stop it. Why?"

Lee: The final devkit was released a little bit later than our expectations, so the optimization is a little behind.

Q: What are some of the environmental hazards you'll run into? We see falling boulders on this one...
Mizuguchi: We're preparing lots of stages, including castles and cities. They're really like showcases of AI and physics -- you'll see fire hazards, water hazards, cannons, explosions, falling bodies (laughs).

Q: Originally I think this was being considered as a title for the Japan launch, but now I'm hearing it's being re-evaluated for a possible worldwide launch (ed. note -- Ninety-Nine Nights has been pushed back to January for Japan).
Mizuguchi: We've got a big mission, to make this game a success in the Japanese market first. Of course we're also keeping the worldwide market in mind. Everything -- the character design, art, world, music, and concept is keeping this in mind. As far as the localization of dialogue goes, we're using lipsync technology so it should be easy.

Q: I noticed you yesterday on the floor watching other people playing the game. What's that like, seeing a game coming from concept stages all the way until a consumer can actually play it?
Mizuguchi: Not so many people understand what's happening in this game yet. I think this is a good intro, the TGS version, but people won't really know what this game is about until the final version is released. I think people are feeling something from this version, though. I hope so (laughs).

Play: What does the title, Ninety-Nine Nights, refer to? Is it a story element?
Mizuguchi: Yeah, it's a story element, but we're keeping it secret, what the Ninety-Nine Nights are. I'm really fond of this title.

Q: Do you think you'll be developing more games that have a sort of global view from now on? Do you think there's still a lot of difference between what's appreciated in different territories?
Mizuguchi: I think many developers in Japan, most developers, are just paying attention to the Japanese market. But we, Q Entertainment, and Phantagram also, we're always watching the worldwide market. And Microsoft is of course a worldwide company. This makes for excellent chemistry. I think we're making a worldwide title. But what do you think -- would this style of gameplay be weird for US and European customers? Is it okay?

Q: (Various members of the press give their response; universal enthusiasm)
Mizuguchi: I have a question!

Play: Please, go ahead (laughs).
Mizuguchi: If we were going to change something for the US and European market...character designs, or music or something...should we change anything?

Q: (Various members of the press give their response; the general feeling is don't change anything)
Mizuguchi: What about online play? Is it necessary?

Q: (Various members of the press give their response; network co-op play would be a huge asset)
Mizuguchi: Hmm...

Q: Is online co-op possible?
Mizuguchi: (Smiles knowingly, all laugh) So, how's this interview going for you (laughs)?

Lee: We definitely want to add more Xbox Live features, but nothing's decided yet.

Play: I guess if we could conclude with a message for your overseas fans...
Mizuguchi: Sure. We're thinking about the hi-def experience. We want to make it a new experience. We're taking it to the next level (laughs)! We're working to get this game into the Western markets as soon as possible.

Lee: I just really hope Western users enjoy this game.

PlayStation 10th Anniversary

It's hard to believe that it's been ten years since we marveled at Ridge Racer at home or experienced the first 3D fighter in Battle Arena Toshinden. It was just the beginning of an awkward but inspiring ride as Sony ushered in the transition from 2D to 3D gaming—a road littered with broken dreams on top of visionary gold. The Sega Saturn rose up to nip at Sony's invading heels but made the mistake of trying to compete in 3D rather than innovate with more stunning 2D offerings like Astal, resulting in a swift defeat, while Nintendo worked their own bit of 3D magic with the Nintendo 64. When the dust settled, however, it was Sony who reigned supreme. Entering the market as a result of a Nintendo deal gone awry they managed to conquer the industry with their very first console. The PlayStation changed gaming forever, and it doesn't look like they're going to let up anytime soon. Dave Halverson

play Staff Top 25 US PlayStation All Time

1. Castlevania Symphony of the Night *Konami*
How ironic that the clear winner is a 2D game. There's just no denying the majesty of Iga's last 2D console Castlevania. We may never get another so, hold onto it tightly.

2. Final Fantasy VII *Square*
3. Metal Gear Soild *Konami*
4. Crash Bandicoot *SCEA*
5. Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus *GT*
6. Resident Evil *Capcom*
7. Tomb Raider *Eidos*
8. Silent Hill *Konami*
9. Final Fantasy IX *Square*
10. Vagrant Story *Square*
11. Klonoa *Namco*
12. Street Fighter Alpha 3 *Capcom*
13. Chrono Cross *Square*
14. Wipeout *SCEA*
15. PaRappa The Rappa *SCEA*
16. Grandia *SCEA*
17. Gran Turismo *SCEA*
18. Tekken 3 *Namco*
19. Jumping Flash 2 *SCEA*
20. Ridge Racer *Namco*
21. Silhouette Mirage *Working Designs*
22. Final Fantasy Tactics *Square*
23. Vandal Hearts *Konami*
24. Medievil *SCEA*
25. Parasite Eve *Square*

Top Fifteen Rare or Sleeper / Honorable Mentions

1. Hermie Hopperhead: 2D platforming *SCEA/Yuke's Japan Only*
2. Tail of the Sun: First Open World 3D Action Game *SCEA*
3. Rakugaki Showtime: 3D Fighting *Treasure Japan Only*
4. Blaster Master: Blasting again: Driving/Action *Sunsoft*
5. Tai Fu Wrath of the Tiger: Action *Activision*
6. Destrega: Extraordinary Arena Fighter *Koei*
7. C-12: Final Resistance: *SCEE Cambridge Studios* **(released well into the PS2's reign) SCEA**
8. Fear Effect Retro Helix: Sexiest PS Action Game *Eidos*
9. Tomba 2: 2D gameplay with 3D elements and graphics *Whoopee Camp/SCEA*
10. Motor Toon Gran Prix: Rubbery toon-based Racing *SCEA*
11. Wild 9: Action, Heavy Metal, and Torture as the main play mechanic *Shiny*
12. Strider 2: Amazing (but too easy) follow up to the arcade classic *Capcom*
13. Wild Arms: RPG The first and best in the series *SCEA*
14. Brave Fancer Musashi: Square's first 3D action game *Square*
15. Ape Escape: First Dual Analog Action Game: *SCEA*

Best game that never was:
Thrill Kill: Never Released due to censorship… Find it Online!

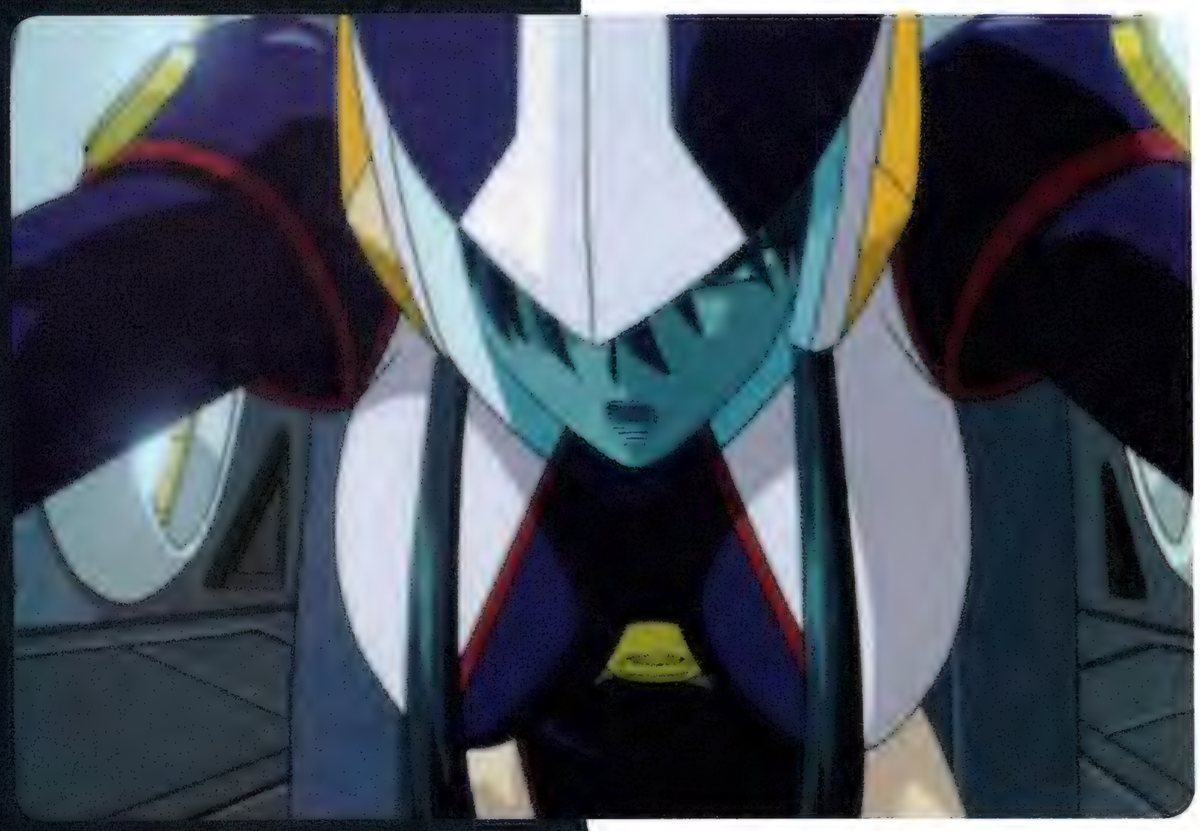
play anime

Godanner

Heavy metal marriage

"Like all the best series, there is much diversion in the midst..."

I think I'll take the fifth on this caption.



As Godannar gets underway, a bold Dannar pilot (as in giant flying robot) Goh—defending Japan from an invading Mimetic invader beast—takes time out of his busy schedule protecting the planet to rescue a young girl (Anna Aoi) from becoming spatula fodder as she is rocked out of a fleeing helicopter and sent plummeting to Earth— common enough ground for your run-of-the-mill mecha mélange scenario—only Godannar isn't run-of-the-mill. Fast forward five years and Goh and Anna (now 16 and much his junior) are being married, but before the procession commences a new threat appears and Goh is summoned into battle. Cue the tangled web. Much earlier Goh had lost his first wife and co-pilot in battle so he is, to say the least, wary of letting Anna anywhere near the combat zone, especially since the Mimetic beasts have been attacking more frequently and are still highly unpredictable. Meanwhile, Anna just happens to be the daughter Kiriko Aoi, commander of the Japanese Branch of the Dannar offensive.

Back to the attack, Goh (on his wedding day no less) is about to taste Mimetic death just as—you got it—Anna, piloting a female robot, the Okusaer, for the first time (she wasn't so keen about being left at the altar) comes to the rescue, holding off the attack long enough for her and Goh's robots to combine and put the beast down in spectacular fashion. Next on the menu, Anna, of course, wants to become Goh's new co-pilot, to which he is understandably opposed; but business is business and she's a natural born top gun so it boils down to whether or not she can withstand the rigorous training, and moreover what Mom has to say, who seems ill surprised that her daughter is a total badass, even if she is a diminutive, pink haired babe. Much to Goh's chagrin, Anna doesn't just pass the tests but pretty much breaks every record in the process and so, as our preview volume came to a close, the plot had adequately thickened.

Perhaps the best thing about Goddanar though, other than the fact that it's one of the best looking TV series you'll ever see (great animation, a vivid palette and tremendous design abound) is what happens around the main plot. Like all the best series, there is much diversion in the midst; the maintenance crew (Goh and Anna's relationship and marriage were well kept secrets) are a chatty unhinged bunch full of side stories, and Kiriko seems to be a master manipulator. Fan service is also in full bloom and I might add seemingly even better than ADV's other squad-based mecha magnum opus, Gravion Zwei. When it's this good one can never get enough.

Dave Halverson

Godannar — **9.5** Score

Volume: 1

+ Amazing in every way, from the animation to story to the cast and supporting characters.

− The age difference between, Goh and Anna is a little, shall we say, wide.

Released by: ADV Films **Rating:** TV-MA
Running Time: 125 minutes **Available:** October 4

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Tetsujin 28

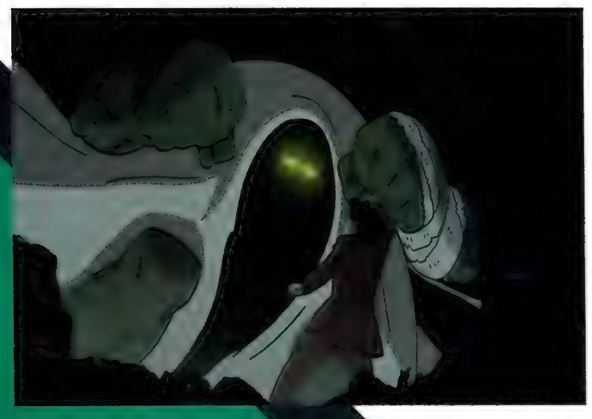
Bigger than big, stronger than strong, and better than ever

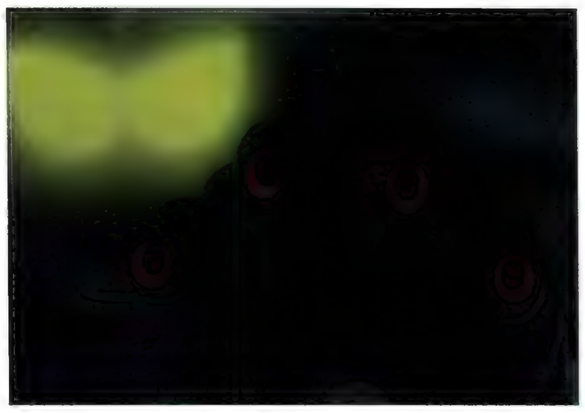
Renamed Gigantor when it came to the states back in 1963, Tetsujin 28 features the original cast (in a re-imagined story) in their proper Japanese namesake so don't expect Jimmy Sparks, Doctor Bob Brilliant, Inspector Ignatz Blooper, or everyone's favorite utility man Dick Strong. As much as I love Gigantor in all of its cheesy splendor (how did Cat's Meow get munitions onto all those penguins?) this is the series I've waited half a lifetime for. If you like Giant Robo (and who doesn't), Tetsujin 28 is absolute requisite viewing. Shedding its innocent veneer from the outset, Tetsujin's origins are actually rooted in pain: With Japan looking all but defeated in World War II, the military ordered genius scientist, Professor Kaneda, to leave his pregnant wife behind, and voyage to a top secret lab in the South seas to develop giant robots encased in giant missiles to fire upon the US (now that would have been something to see). Amidst the project which was plagued with failures (27 to be exact) news came over of a bombing raid that all but leveled Tokyo. Believing his wife and young son dead, Kaneda built Tetsujin 28 and gave it the name he and his wife chose for their son (Shotaro) to compensate for the loss and planned to raise 28 as a father would a child. Realizing the atrocity of his creation however, he sealed himself and his creation away, and ordered his protégé, Professor Shikishima (a.k.a. Bob Brilliant), to annihilate Tetsujin 28 should he ever be discovered.

> "If you like Giant Robo (and who doesn't), Tetsujin 28 is absolute requisite viewing."

Fast forward ten years and it is a time for economic recovery in Japan as they endeavor to fuel their economy by developing the world's first giant robots in a project headed by Shikishima who has also been caring for Kaneda's son (alive and well having escaped the devastation) Shotaro, now a boy detective who wears his socks way too high. Just as Shikishima is on the brink of awakening his giant robot (27) Tetsujin 28 mysteriously launches directly at Tokyo and ends up landing exactly where young Shotaro is shaking down some thugs. Moments later the two are united but it's not all plaid sport coats and remote controls just yet. 28 has already killed a man and no one knows for sure what he's been programmed for. Without giving too much away the entire first volume is pretty much a gem, introducing Dr. Franken, Black Ox and a few unexpected surprises. Presented in retro militaristic form with sparkling digital animation, Tetsujin 28 is a beautiful show that has all the making of a classic series.

Dave Halverson





Tetsujin 28

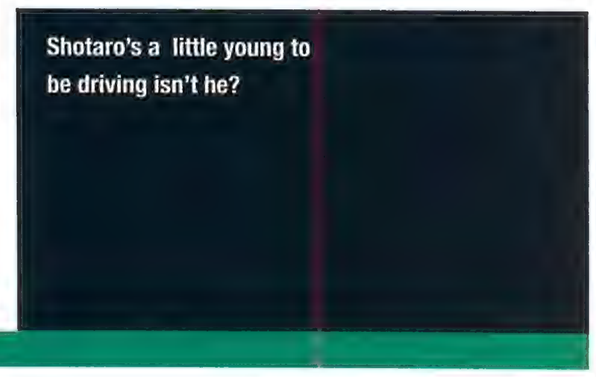
Volume 1

9.5 Score

O Nostalgia meets modern techinique and sensibilities, with just the right dose of propoganda.

X hard to find fault with this one. I'm not crazy about the opening and Shotaro socks really bug me.

Released by: Geneon Entertainment **Rating:** 13 and up
Running Time: 115 minutes **Available:** September



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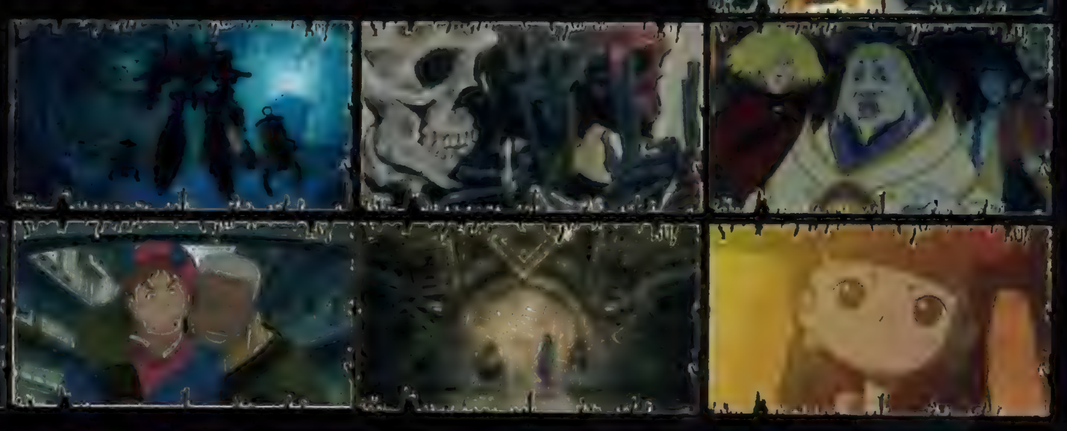

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AH! MY GODDESS

Sticky sweet...for now at least

When we're kids the ultimate form of exaggeration comes in the form of talking farm animals (rabbit, duck, rooster, pig, Tasmanian devil) but our imaginations don't have to die with our childhoods. That's why the Japanese created anime. Now we can grow up and watch shows about beautiful goddesses descending from heaven to cater to our every whim, which is exactly what happens to Keiichi Morisato, a freshman at Nekomi Technical Institute and loser extraordinaire. If you've seen the OVA or read the manga you already know where this is heading, but watching it unfold in full bloom and perfectly recreated is as special as it is sticky sweet.

Keiichi Morisato is five-foot-three, so broke he lives with the gear-heads from his university auto-club, his bike won't start, and he's been rejected by the most popular girl in school. When he asked her out she didn't just say no, she pretty much went for the jugular and blew him and his funky sport jacket out of the water. Yet still, somehow, Keiichi has remained an optimistic kind hearted person...exactly the criteria for divine intervention. As a result of his diligence in the wake of ultra-nerddom, he is chosen to receive a goddess, as in a drop-dead gorgeous teenage hotty from heaven who emerges through a mirror to grant him one wish; any wish. Now we all know any of us would go for unlimited wealth because with mansions, jets, cars, and assorted bobbles come all the women (or men) you can handle along with unlimited free time and so on, but this is a proper young Japanese teen and so he wishes for his goddess, Belldandy, to stay by his side forever (awww)... Not be his girlfriend and stay by his side, mind you...just stay by his side. Fool! His wish granted, the first order of business is getting kicked out of the auto-club (no girls allowed) so now we get to spend the remaining four episodes watching Keiichi get his life together while attached to a beautiful magical goddess from heaven. Okay, so maybe the talking farm animals are more exciting but things do get better... Beyond the core story, Keiichi's auto-club cronies steal the show and as the series progresses, a bounty of heaven sent hotness awaits along with the racing soul I so love about this rich, if not groundbreaking story. Dave Halverson

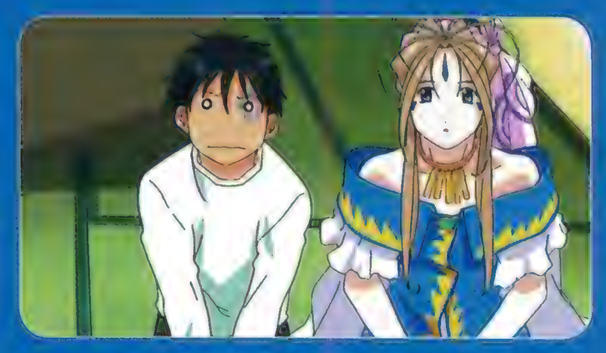
Ah! My Goddess — **9.0** Score

Volume: 1 - "Always and Forever"

Great manga, great OVA, and now a great TV series.

It's on the light and innocent side out of the gate, but things will heat up soon enough.

Released by: Anime Works **Rating:** 13 and up
Running Time: 125 minutes **Available:** September



"...she pretty much went for the jugular and blew him and his funky sport jacket out of the water."

Keiichi's buddies bust in and bust him big time.

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Rurouni Kenshin

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Japan is a land experiencing times of troubled peace and renewal after a long and bloody civil war. Swords and killing are outlawed, but all is not as well as it would seem. Lurking in the shadows are many survivors of the revolution awaiting their chance for vengeance. Only the former government assassin, Kenshin Himura, can keep the peace. Kenshin gives up the life of "Battousai the man slayer" and sets off as a lone wanderer. His travels lead to the Kamiya Dojo where he discovers the chance to start life over. Can Kenshin keep faithful to these new ideals as his past threatens to resurface, or will his violent instincts take control again?

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Cowboy Bebop Remix

A Lotta 'Bop a Loop 'Bop a Whack Bang Boom

This is the story of five bounty hunters, thrown together to live on a ship and save the universe... for a price, of course. An ex-cop, a gambling vixen, a wiry fighter, a feral-like hacker, and a dog. *Yes, I said a dog.* He *was* a bounty at one point in episode 2. Wait, come to think of it, so was the gambler (episode 3)... and the hacker! You can get the blues watching their stories... and the jazz, and the rock and roll, and the funk... because demigoddess Yoko Kano puts a score together that finds something for everyone, kind of like the show's themes! Because there's a *Desperado*-like fugitive tale, an animal caper with *Game of Death* elements, a gambling flimflam, an eco-terrorist hit squad family, and mob revenge with some pretty deep history involved. And this is just the first volume— you ain't seen nothin' yet.

Since premiering in 1998 in Japan, the show constantly reveals details when you go back over them, and go over them some more of its 26 episodes. Bits and pieces of history begin to fall into place, but a few manage to fall under the couch too, leaving you to fill it in with your imagination, which isn't too hard. The show never goes so deep in its stories that it drowns in it, nor does it have the simplicity of a Saturday morning cartoon. It's got something for everyone... comedy, action, drama, revenge, true love, death, rebirth, horror, science fiction. No easy feat, to be sure, but somehow director Shinichiro Watanabe got the music, the stories, the look, and the characters so tight that there hasn't been anything like it, nor likely to be again. And with the new 5.1 sound (and a picture so sharp that you can cut yourself from looking at it), this benchmark of a series just got a heck of a lot more funky. The music is one of the best variety compilations ever, and you'd never know that they came from the same person, covering every major (and some minor) genres. If you haven't watched an episode after all this time, now's the time. For those that have, turn it up and let it fly, because this borderline-miscreant crew is back for one last thumpin' score. Jim Dewey

Cowboy Bebop Remix — **10** Score

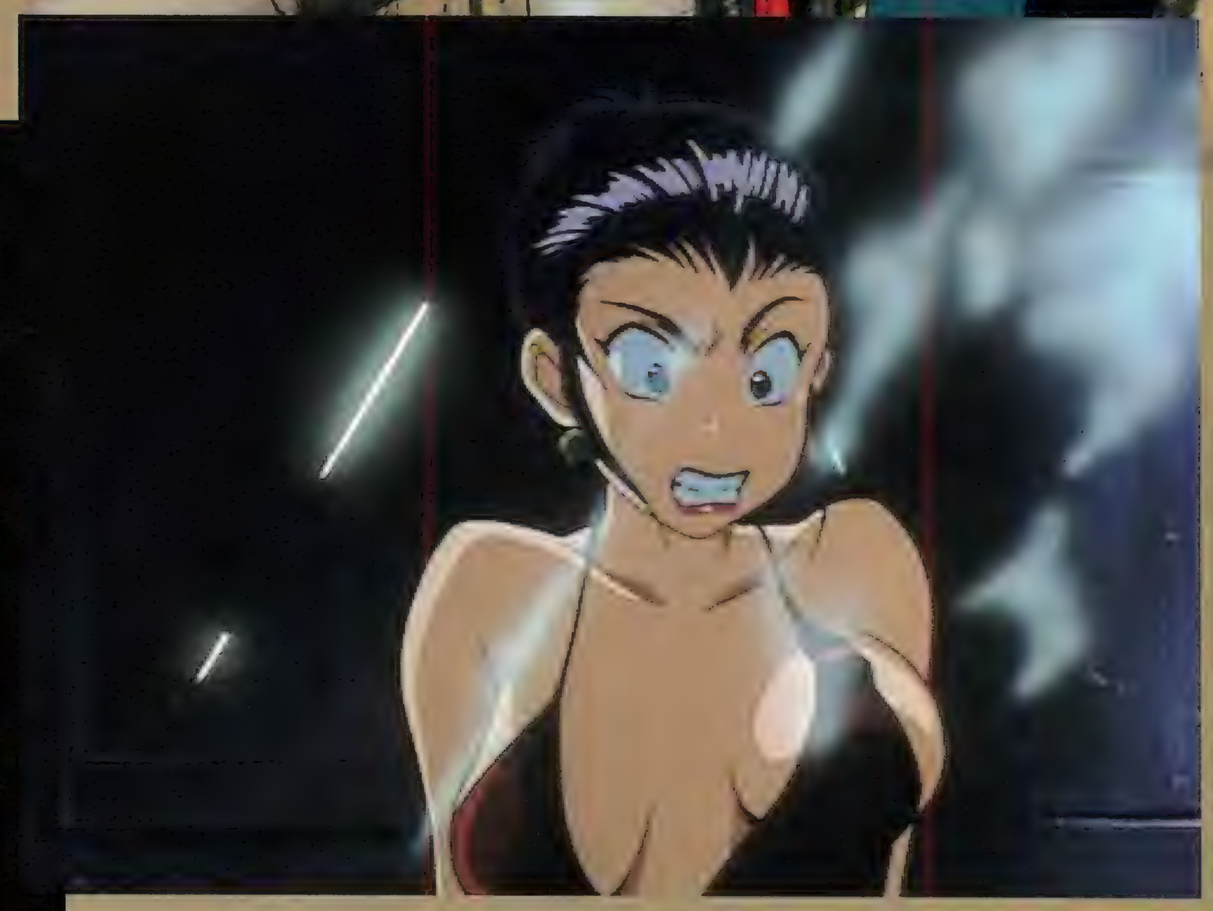
Volume: 1

O As if you need any more good reasons to get this series by the time you finish this sentence.

X Anime commentaries can get so boring! And Radical Edward is not here yet! No fair no fair no fair!

Released by: Bandai Entertainment **Rating:** 13 and up
Running Time: 125 minutes **Available:** Now

"If you haven't watched an episode after all this time, now's the time."



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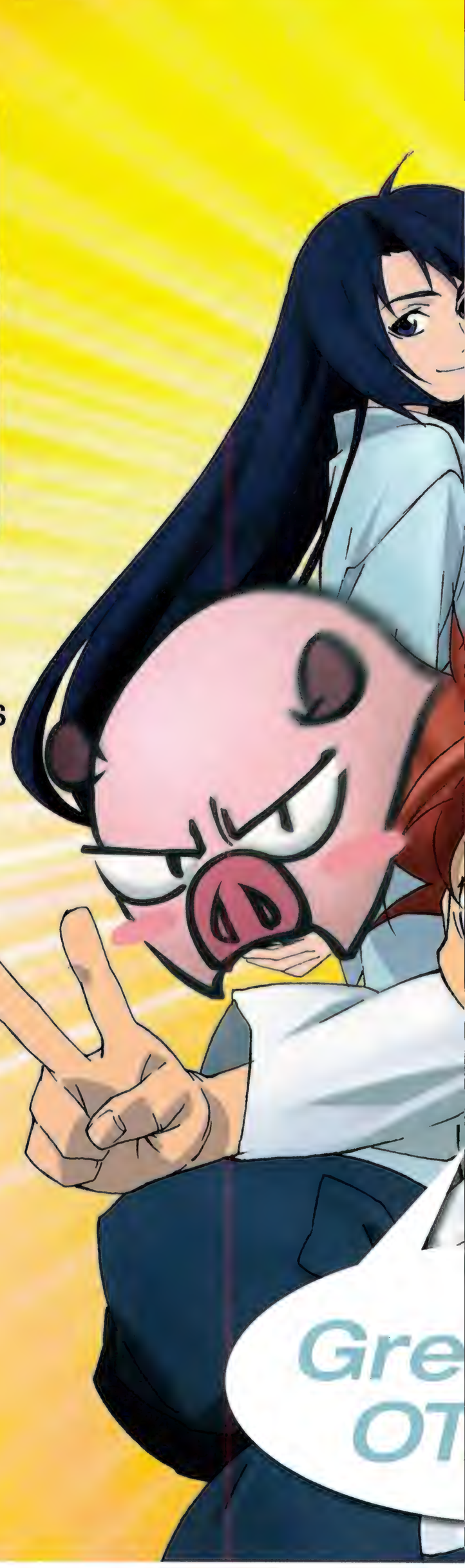

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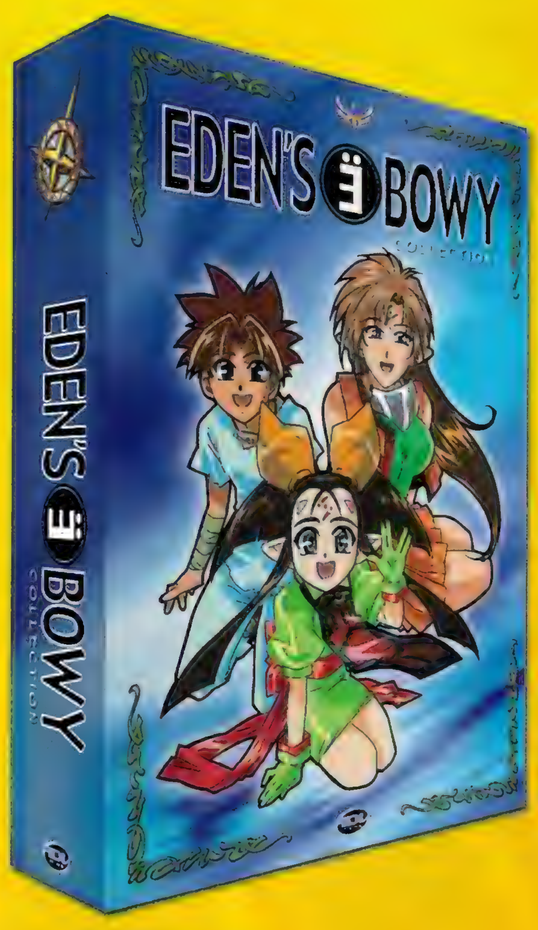

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Mythical Detective Loki Ragnarok

Volume 1 - "God & Detectives"

8.5 Score

Released by: ADV Films **Rating:** TV-PG **Running Time:** 100 minutes **Available:** October 18

Norse Gods have always been some tough customers, either on the ethereal plane or here on Earth— from Hiemdall to Freya to other unpronounceable names right up through the big guy himself, Odin. So what is it exactly that mischievous Loki did to tick him off something fierce enough to be banished to Earth as a boy? As it is, Loki is running a detective agency on Earth now, and things are a little slow. It isn't until he meets curiosity-seeking Mayura, a dippy high schooler looking for a creepy old doll that got cat-napped, that that his past catches up to him and he finds that his otherworldly investigations seem to center around his old cohorts instigating them...Between the solid line work of the character designs and the competent animation, it certainly makes for enjoyable viewing. But the instillation of a cute little long-eared mascot and the fact that even the other gods are coming down to Earth as teens or younger as well leaves me scratching my head over the bigger mystery of what Loki did. Chalk it up to viewer demographics, I suppose. Nevertheless, despite some occasional spotty voice work, *Loki Ragnarok* will appeal to *Case Closed* fans, if for the genius-shrunk-to-a-kid factor— though more attention needs to be put on the *detective* aspect. I wonder if they had a god for that... Jim Dewey

"Loki Ragnarok will appeal to *Case Closed* fans..."

Ghost Stories

Volume 1

It's an equal-opportunity offender, and the jokes fly faster than Patrick Swayze on a bender!

Sometimes the humor gets a little thick on the celebrity references, alienating it from the Japanese locale.

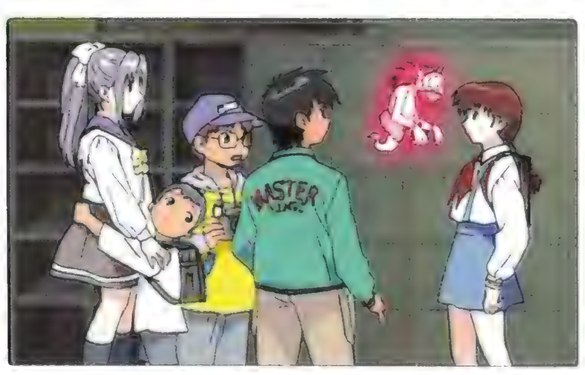
9.0 Score

Released by: ADV Films **Rating:** TV-PG **Running Time:** 75 minutes **Available:** October 25

School sucks, we all know that. But does it have to be the clubhouse for wayward spirits? New student Satsuki's little brother brought their cat to class the first day, but it ran off into the old abandoned school next door. Her chauvinist neighbor Hajime, his dorky best friend Leo, and upperclass born-again Jesus freak Momoko (whose hat blew in to the building) all come along. They meet a big honkin' demon named Amanojaku, and end up defeating him using a spirit guidebook they find hidden away by Satsuki's mother years before. But, he ends up residing in the cat after his defeat. If Satsuki is ever going to get their beloved feline back to his normal state, they're going to have to defeat the rest of Amanojaku's buddies first.

Believe it or not, this series is a comedy with some horror elements, not the other way around. The American localization of the series is handled by many of the crew who worked on *Super Milk Chan*, so you know the pop culture references are going to flow like water, much like in episode two with the toilet demon (it's not that bad— really, heck the jokes about it are worse). Some of the best voice talent from the ADV stable deftly cranks out the humor, even if it goes lowbrow at times. The terror parts don't go above a PG level in scariness, but that would ultimately work against the humor. Well, how about that— made it through the review without a mention of *Ghostbusters*. Jim Dewey

"Believe it or not, this series is a comedy with some horror elements, not the other way around."



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Yumeria

Volume 1 - "Enter the Dreamscape"

- Encounters a competitor for a mere vampire anime — he's a dream-eating demon!
- The plot's a bit basic, and the humor isn't always the best. Sometimes it's a little crude.

7.5 Score

Released by: ADV Films **Rating:** TV-14 **Running Time:** 100 minutes **Available:** Now

I wish I had dreams like Tomokazu. He dreams about fighting off monolithic enemies surrounded by beautiful young girls in winged skimpy outfits. Only one of them he somehow brought back from the dream world— a girl named Mone, which, incidentally, is the only word she can say. The other girls he knows from the real world, but they're only able to meet up with him when he sleeps or is rendered unconscious (usually by his lolita-complex fetishist teacher, always jealous that Tomokazu receives so much attention). In the dream world, all he has to do is touch the girls to activate their magical transformations, and acts as a sort of battery recharger for their weapons by holding them close. Some guys have all the luck.

Never being one so much for the bouncy-bouncy one guy/gaggle of girls stories unlike other people, I found *Yumeria* never seeming to exploit, as best illustrated in the sexy-yet-modest costumes. While some of the girls are formulaic, the younger ones (Mone and Neneko, the cat-hat wearing one) are adorable but refreshing in their characterizations, and Tomokazu is relatable. The animation is done rather well for a series, and the color throughout is vibrant without going overboard. The story, while funny in moments, is slight, but that's to be expected given it's a typical "meet the characters, one by one" setup, and will hopefully pick up in future volumes as Tomokazu dreams bigger.

Now if I could only stop dreaming about riding public transportation all the time...

Jim Dewey

"I found Yumeria never seeming to exploit, as best illustrated in the sexy-yet-modest costumes"

Like I said...some guys have all the luck...

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What's better than an extra-dimensional alien in Tokyo co-created by Courtney Love? (Wait is that still a good thing?). An extra-dimensional alien in Tokyo co-created by Courtney Love in your house, of course.

watch this

Ghost in the Shell SAC Special Edition Box: Official Log 1

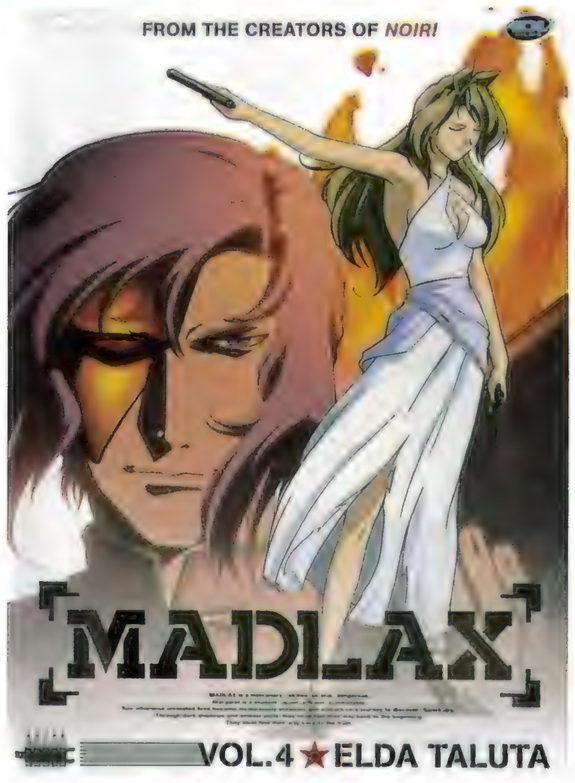
Released by: Bandai/Manga Entertainment
Rating: 13 and up **Now Playing:** Volume 1

Bandai and Manga are offering two very special ways to get into SAC 2nd Gig, with a Special Edition box containing Volume 1 in an art covered tin along with the stellar soundtrack (see last month's essentials) and the quintessential SAC collectible, Stand Alone Complex Official Log 1; a beautiful 148 page bound book filled with designs, interviews, creator profiles, the meaning behind episodes 01-19, an amzing DVD and much more.

Elfen Lied

Released by: ADV Films
Rating: TV MA **Now Playing:** Volume 3

Elfen Lied is on Volume 3 and continues to only get better and more compelling as the body count rises. One of the very best mature series of the year, if you're not already into it you have 3 DVDs to go buy right now.



MADLAX

Released by: ADV Films
Rating: TV 14 **Now Playing:** Volume 3

MADLAX is on Volume 4 and the journey to sanctuary for MADLAX and Margaret continues to twist and turn. This intense amalgam of action, drama and suspense from the creators of Noir is not to me missed.

play this

Cowboy Bebop

Released by: Bandai **System:** Japanese PlayStation 2

Since we're not getting Cowboy Bebop for PS2 stateside, it's time to dial up your local import shop and pull yourself away from Bomba long enough to join Spike and the gang for some fashy decent BeBop-style action and intrigue (albeit in Japanese). It's not a great game by any stretch of the imagination but it's okay, and it's Bebop.

Full Metal Panic Fumoffu

Released by: ADV Films
Rating: TV PG **Now Playing:** Volume 3

Just when you think Fumoffu couldn't get any crazier, Kaname and Sousuke have to go and help a pacifist rugby team. Sousuke and pacifism...yeah, right. Oh...and there's hot springs...hot, hot springs. This series is just too good.

Samurai Gun

Released by: ADV Films
Rating: TV MA **Now Playing:** Volume 2

Ah, finally Volume 2 of ADV's stylish Samurai Gun. The struggle continues as the Shogunate aren't even close to being defeated, in fact, the Samurai Guns are pretty much outgunned making this volume all the more captivating.

Grenadier

Released by: Anime Works
Rating: 13 and up **Now Playing:** Volume 2

Anime Works' second volume of Grenadier (another amazing title in their awesome '05 arsenal) has Rushuna taking on about the only thing she can't charm the pants off of: deadly female assassins. The character designs by the way... simply exquisite.

NOW READING

the wonderful world of manga

Ghost Hunt

Publisher: Del Rey **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Horror/Drama
Rating: 13 and older **Story:** Shiho Inada **Art:** Fuyumi Ono

If you like Ghost Stories, as in character developed—not overly sensational—ghost stories, Ghost Hunt is a great read; as close as you'll get to a novel in animated form as you're likely to get. Originating at a decrepit school building long scheduled for the wrecking ball, every time someone tries to tear it down strange events occur… events that draw Mai Taniyama and her friends to investigate. But rather than the usual token spirits, they find something much better…a deep compelling story! **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You like a psychological thriller with a lot of manga-style color and wit.

Samurai Man

Publisher: Anime Works **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Drama
Rating: 16 and up **Story and Art:** Naoki Serizawa

Why is it every time someone finally gets the nerve to tell someone they like them that giant armored samurai rain down from the sky and start brawling? Ryouma has the worst luck, because he also ends up skewered like a shish-ka-bob protecting beautiful Katsumi. Thank goodness he's saved by the spirit of samurai King Shiyana, but only ends up having problems as they both can't get in sync when battling a disturbing turtle-man assassin, heavy on the "ass". **Jim Dewey**

Read it if: You dig spirit samurai emerging from heroes' chests without all the sticky mess.

Eiken

Publisher: Anime Works **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Comedy
Rating: 16 and up **Story and Art:** Seiji Matsuyama

Densuke never dreamt his desire to participate in extracurricular activities would land him in a club where he is literally surrounded, and often sandwiched in between, gargantuan breasts. As the only male member of the Eiken Club he'll be participating in assorted activities, most of which involve bikinis, as the one he really wants, Chiharu Shinonome (it was love at first accidental squeeze), grows more and more elusive. ULTRA fan service supreme all the way? Oh yeah, you bet…**Dave Halverson**

Read it if: Sorry, gotta say it…If you like boobs; lots and lots and lots of boobs. with a playful spirit.

Dramacon

Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Comedy
Rating: 13 and older **Story and Art:** Svetlana Chmakova

If you actually recognize what this title means, you have experienced the life of a fan convention. Congratulations! ...and sorry at the same time. Comic writer Christine's going to her first anime convention with her boyfriend to sell their book. Only he spends more time staring down cosplayers' tops than selling it. Add in a mysterious handsome cosplayer, hotel rooms, crushes, drunkenness, fast food and dense crowds, and you've got the 'con experience from one talented writer/artist in Svetlana Chmakova. **Jim Dewey**

Read it if: It's a convention in a book! And no luggage to tote around!

Gacha Gacha

Publisher: Del Rey **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Comedy
Rating: 16 and up **Story and Art:** Hiroyuki Tamakoshi

When Kouhei, mysteriously transforms while on vacation in Hawaii from all-too-familiar gal pal to ultra pure on one side, and pretty much slutty (that would be the surprising part) on the other, it sends her bestest friend Kurara into a complete tail spin as he tries to help her keep her secret a secret while restraining his increasingly strong feelings to jump her alter ego's bones…if he only had the right stuff. Gacha Gacha has totally lived up to its billing.
Dave Halverson

Read it if: You don't mind being teased so bad that you want to jump into the pages and take matters into your

Lunar Legend Tsukihime

Publisher : DrMaster **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Horror **Rating:** 15 and up
Manga by: Saskishonen, Original Creators Type-Moon/Tsukihime Project

Someone needs to be more careful about who he dices into bite-sized chunks (17 to be exact). So Shiki was born cursed with the ability to see the threads of life and rejected by his now dead father; that's no reason to go Iron Chef on a beautiful blonde…If only she really were. When Shiki finally unleashes his rage, using the threads he sees as a diagram for his blade, the life he takes shows up the next day demanding an explanation. She is actually a powerful vampire and now she wants her pound of flesh. **Dave H**

Read it if: You want to experience one of the best original horror graphic novels ever produced…Oh, and see the

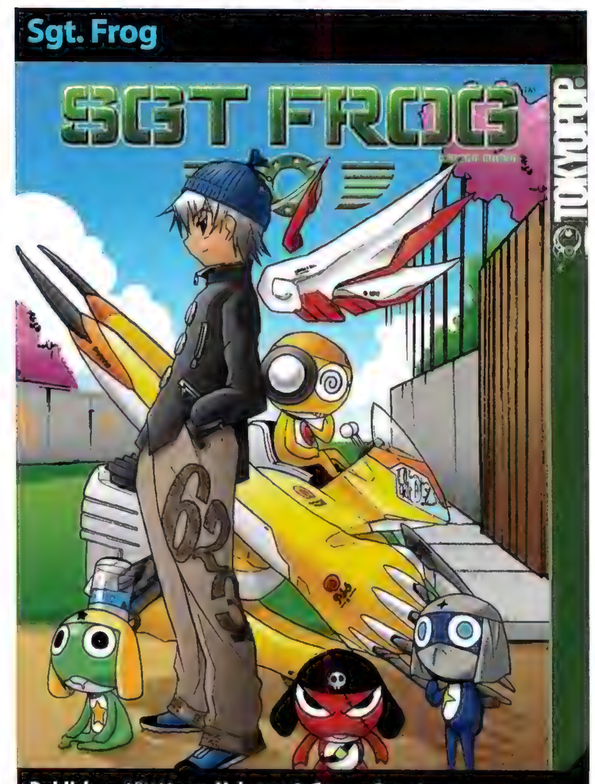
Orphen

Publisher: ADV Manga **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Adventure
Rating: 13 and up **Story by:** Yoshinobu Akita **Art:** Hajime Sawada

The trouble with Orphen the anime was that for such a great story (the cast being among the coolest threesomes ever assembled), the quality was all over the place, ranging from good to utter crap as the series changed producers more than most guys change their underwear; and likewise for the game. Not so for the manga, which is extremely well drawn and written and…not necessarily a mirror image of the anime, giving fans something new and newcomers something to search eBay for. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You like an older, cooler, darker Harry Potter who fled his version of Hogwarts in search of fortune and glory.

Sgt. Frog



Publisher: ADV Manga **Volume:** 2 **Genre:** Comedy
Rating: 13 and older **Story and Art:** Eiji Nonaka

...We find ourselves once again looking in on the exploits of Sgt. Frog, the best manga about space frogs taking over the world, ever. Momoka tries to get herself invited to a hot springs resort vacation by getting Fuyuki to win the vacation at a lottery, but things don't go as planned and Momoka and Koyuki have an all-out battle for the one extra ticket. Soon after, Keroro falls in love with Fuyuki's Children's Day decorations sent from his grand mother, and turns them into weapons (see; now how cool is that?).
Dave Halverson

Read it if: You're into frog invasions gone completely awry.

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Lights Out

Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Drama
Rating: 13 and older **Story and Art:** Myung-Jin Lee

Lights Out is about Gun, a problem child (okay maybe that's putting it lightly) who at the request (okay begging) of his family decides to turn over a new leaf... So he transfers to a new High School, rents a room at the local co-ed dorm and begins life anew. It's there that rabble rousing is replaced with female arousing, but love, as they say, hurts. Trouble, of the female persuasion (scary ghost lady!—lovely landlord's granddaughter!) along with pretty much every other conceivable variety is still after our hero, Gun; as to whether or not he can beat it off with a stick remains to be seen. The coolest thing about the flamboyant and oh-so-fun to read Lights Out is that it was Myung-Jin Lee's (Ragnarok) debut work presented 10-years later, warts and all. The man had the mad skills from book one. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You like gorgeous girls in skin tight leather on road bikes (a.k.a. heaven) and a lot of other really out-there teen angst

Kingdom Hearts

Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Fantasy
Rating: All ages **Adapted:** Shiro Amano

When you wish upon a star...You'll end up in a kick-ass Square video game filled with Disney characters...At least if you're 14-year-old Sora, caught up in a freak storm on your island home and transported to a parallel world where Court Wizard Donald and Captain Goofy are on a mission to find their master, Mickey, and return him to his throne at Disney Castle. Learning of The Heartless—shadowy specters that feed of the darkness in peoples' hearts—the three join forces and, Keyblade in hand, set out to find Sora's friends and return Mickey to his rightful position. Like I needed to tell you that. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You, like everyone else that's ever touched a PS2 controller, simply can't get enough Kingdom Hearts.

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anime database

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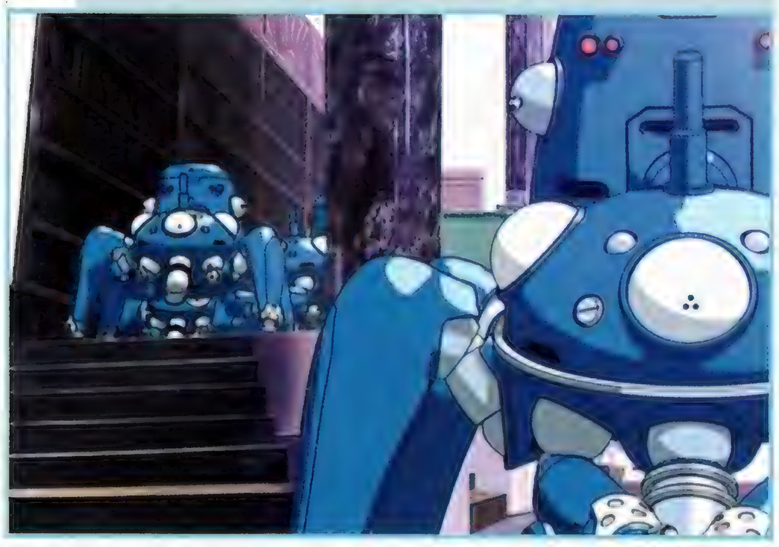
02	**Samurai 7** *funimation productions*
03	**Steamboy** *columbia tristar*
04	**Cowboy Bebop Remix** *bandai entertainment*
05	**Appleseed** *geneon entertainment*
06	**Area 88** *adv films*
07	**Mars Daybreak** *bandai entertainment*
08	**Gilgamesh** *adv films*
09	**Street Fighter Alpha Generations** *manga ent.*
10	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*



Play Magazine Top Ten

01	**Ghost in the Shell SAC 2nd Gig** *bandai/manga ent.*
02	**Godannar** *adv films*
03	**Burst Angel vol. 4** *funimation productions*
04	**Tetsujin 28** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Cowboy Bebop Remix** *bandai entertainment*
06	**Samurai 7 vol. 2** *funimation productions*
07	**Gankutsuou** *geneon entertainment*
08	**Ghost Stories** *adv films*
09	**Grenadier vol. 2** *anime works*
10	**Full Metal Panic Fumoffu vol. 3** *adv films*

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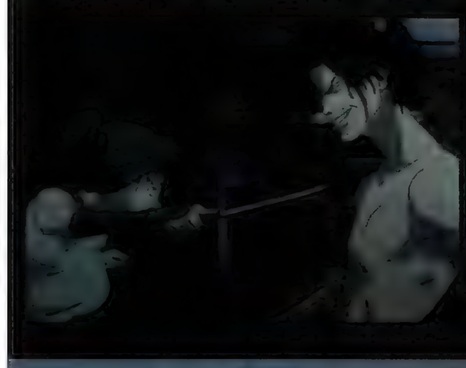


Samurai Champloo
geneon entertainment

The deeper we go, the more Champloo delivers; always dripping with style and just the right amount of cool.

Steamboy
columbia tristar

The most impressive blending of CG and traditional animation ever put on screen.

Dave Halverson

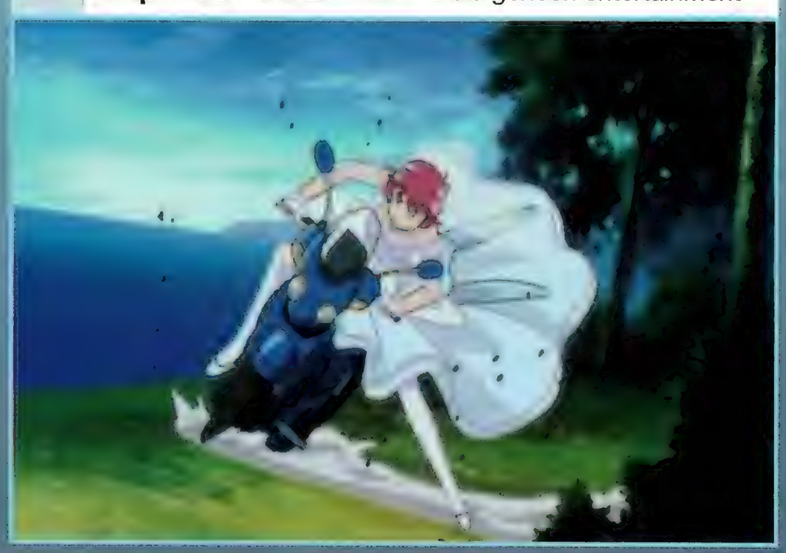
01	**Ghost in the Shell SAC 2nd Gig** *bandai/manga ent.*
02	**Goddanar** *adv films*
03	**Burst Angel vol. 3** *funimation productions*
04	**Tetsujin 28** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Grenadier** *anime works*

Jim Dewey

01	**Cowboy Bebop Remix** *bandai entertainment*
02	**Ghost Stories** *adv films*
03	**Gankutsuou** *geneon entertainment*
04	**Ghost in the Shell SAC 2nd Gig** *bandai/manga ent.*
05	**Cromartie High School** *adv films*

Nelson Lui

01	**Goddanar** *adv films*
02	**Ghost in the Shell SAC 2nd Gig** *bandai/manga ent.*
03	**Grenadier** *anime works*
04	**Full Metal Panic Fumoffu** *adv films*
05	**Daphne in the Brilliant Blue** *geneon entertainment*



Readers' Anime Top Five

01	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*
02	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
03	**Gunslinger Girl** *funimation productions*
04	**Fullmetal Alchemist** *funimation productions*
05	**Ghost in the Shell: SAC** *manga entertainment*

Play Magazine Manga Top Five

01	**I Luv Halloween** *tokyopop manga*
02	**Gacha Gacha** *del rey*
03	**Lights Out** *tokyopop manga*
04	**Kingdom Hearts** *tokyopop manga*
05	**Lunar Legend Tsukihime** *drmaster*

Readers' Most Wanted

01	**Samurai 7** *funimation productions*
02	**One Piece** *toei*
03	**InuYasha** *viz media*
04	**Ghost Talker's Daydream** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Street Fight Alpha Generations** *manga ent.*

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11_05 MIKE GRIFFIN
PC EDITOR

The Revolution controller could be brilliant. Satoru Iwata told me so.

In the first few seconds, it wasn't easy to be drawn-in by the TV remote-style design. During the Iwata speech at the unveiling, watching that little montage of the people doing various things with the Revolution controller…that started to change my outlook. *Of course* that design will work, I thought. It's so straightforward. It's so confident and simple. *Of course* casual gamers can pick that up and have some fun with it, moving their bodies and seeing the pay-off right away on screen. It's like the ultimate couch potato controller. "Nintendo Revolution causes third heart attack. Congress considers ban. News at 11." But seriously, everyone knows how to operate a TV remote. And it involves the most negligible physical displacement to modify the playback of what you're watching. That's where the Revolution controller does a huge about face. When you take a universally familiar physical interface design like a common electronics remote, where everyone understands the basic mechanism of the object in their hands, and you modify it for the purpose of interaction (something beyond caveman-level memorization), and you gel that interaction with motion sensitive control…that connection should come naturally for people, right?

Conceptually, the Revolution controller was becoming a little too diluted. Playing a fishing game with grandpa is cute and all, but how about some *real* next-gen gaming examples? Then Iwata started to talk about how the controller will dramatically improve first person shooter gameplay on a console. That was sort of an odd point to bring up at the Japanese unveiling. So everyone looks at the Revolution controller again to see what he's talking about. I super impose the image of a Wavebird controller over top, and begin to pontificate the perfection of the mouse and keyboard for FPS games…and then the truth of it strikes home like thunder: yeah, seriously, this Revolution controller will be great for first person shooters. I totally agree with you, Mr. Iwata. Steering with the stick add-on and looking and firing with the main motion-sensing remote *will* work, and it could be spectacular. You may have to sit a little closer to the screen—we'll see. So anyway, at this point he has every western player drooling and moaning aloud with visions of Metroid Prime 3 dancing in their heads. Even considering the success of that franchise, to think that Nintendo would heavily factor in the effectiveness of the Revolution controller with a first person shooter—just, wow. In the wake of the montage clip with the drumming, the party games, the sword slashing and the Mario jumping…a blatant reference to a popular western genre was rather compelling.

What else does it do? This is probably the most important part about the Revolution controller, and it's something that Iwata could only hint at. The Revolution controller instantly plants a seed in a developer's mind. This is not the same beanstalk seed that Microsoft or Sony will offer. And it certainly won't result in the same harvest. When a game designer thinks of Revolution now, he doesn't set out with the notion, "I wonder if the multi-cores can handle this action." Or, "Will our physics engine work with an SPE?" Those are complex questions with madly convoluted answers, but no, such concerns won't come to mind when a designer first thinks of a Revolution game concept. Those questions are far too linear, and far too conventional. The first thing he considers is the interaction with that controller: what he can do with it and what he can try to make the player feel, through it. By default, he is thinking about ways to physically involve the player—before the bits, the pixel shaders and the blooms. He's thinking about how to make a game for that controller, and how the idea he had for the other consoles should probably stay on those machines, because everyone else, he realizes, is also trying to conjure up a unique use for that Revolution controller.

"The Revolution controller instantly plants a seed in a developer's mind...And it certainly won't result in the same harvest."

That simple notion hits home because, by default, every Revolution player will have that controller. Just like the remote that came with your TV and DVD player. They weren't optional. So when the designer thinks of a game, he is absolutely 100% sure that a Nintendo Revolution player will have a wireless motion-sensing controller to use. His entire original Revolution game concept will constantly reference that fact, and the idea of player motion in virtually any genre, and how the interaction can be as subtle or as spirited as he aims to make it, comes to fore. Suddenly there's this whole other method to map out emotional content and channel it to the player, and it's surprisingly quantifiable when you're doing it physically, as opposed to exclusively through traditional control, presentation and narrative.

It's an intriguing proposition. Think of your personal favorite developer for a sec. Consider their past titles, the gameplay, the characters and the stories. Think of all that creative energy. Now imagine what he or she would come up with on Revolution, and how potentially liberating it may be for them to explore a facet of game design that most assuredly did not exist until now. And that is why we must love Nintendo and every Revolution they bring to gaming. Satoru Iwata did not have to tell me that.

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Elektra

The comic-book adaptation receives an extensive, unrated director's cut

Interview

Rob Bowman Director **Elektra**

The new cut... I thought it felt a bit edgier, not so candy coated. Maybe that was your original vision to begin with?
Rob Bowman: Thank you for saying so. Maybe the edge is that I removed some additional voice over dialogue. When you're making a movie for a group, for a theater full of people, it's a different means of telling a story than if you're making it for one person sitting at home, or a couple of people. If you're in the theater, you're trying to appeal to a mass audience, thousands, millions of people. You kind of have to do it to make sure everyone in the audience understands where we're going.

I've been a home-theater owner for 20 years. I just wanted it to be a bit more engaging, and I thought the story had to be as edgy as possible, because all of the mythology, the comic books about Elektra are extremely violent and rough, she's angry and all this kind of stuff. I had to first deliver a PG-13 movie. The theatrical version was literally 12 frames from an R. And I said, "I don't believe this, I watch television where people get shot and blood hits and all that stuff... I just don't see why I'm that close to an R." So I had to soften the movie. I put in everything I could that I had taken out to put the edge back into it. Kirigi cutting off MacCabe's head is important to me as a storyteller, because I want the audience to know what kind of person is coming after Elektra. Also, by pulling out some of the dialogue, you have to work a little harder, participate more in the story telling because I'm not making it absolutely clear where I'm going. It becomes more experimental, more impressionistic almost. That's also why I added some stronger color to it. The color also spoke to the tone of the movie. So I did everything I could to what you describe as put the edge back into it...

The studio always has what they want, but here you are on your own, you say you're a home theater buff, you know specifically what you want to do. It's cool to have the opportunity of DVD.
Really cool. It's a wonderful gift from the studio because I honestly didn't even ask. I literally called my editor and said, "I want to do a director's cut, we're just gonna do it." I know the home DVD market is an important business for the studio, and I thought, hey, I'll do it, and if they want do a director's cut, I'll say I'm half way through. To the extent that I did it, all the additional color timing, adding visual effects, seeing Jennifer [Gardner, who plays Elektra] die in one of her kimagories. It speaks to the kind of things she thinks about, which is pretty horrible. It puts a bit more highs and lows into it... I spent 14 weeks on this director's cut squeaking it out.

Wow, that's pretty intensive for a DVD project.
[laughs] Yeah, and I did it for free. But I loved it. I said, "If I'm gonna do this, I want to do it really sweet." And they just backed away... It's not like you have total liberty to do whatever you want, but what I focused on was telling the story the way I originally wanted, designing it for home-theater enthusiasts, remixing the sound.

You've been heavily involved, really from the beginning of your career, from Star Trek to X Files to Reign of Fire to this— that sci-fi, fantasy realm. Are you drawn to the material, or did you just kind of fall into it?
Very wise of you. You know, my favorite movies, some of them are Saturday afternoon stuff, *Jason and the Argonauts*. But I also love *Lawrence of Arabia, Great Expectations*, all kinds of films. You know with *Star Trek*, which was the first left turn I made, I became a free-lance director, and it's nothing more than that was the show that would hire me. I was 26 years old, I had *21 Jump Street*, a couple of *Stingrays* under my belt. Not much. *Star Trek* said hey, we like your stuff, we want you to shoot for us. That became a home for me. It wasn't like I was a trekkie. So what had happened, as I was working my way through television, there was a movie script called *Airborne*. It was kids and rollerblades and whatnot. I was trying to get into the movies, and you just take what comes your way. I finished that, and I just thought, my tastes are really darker, I want to see if I can go back to what I really love, which is scary, dark, shadowy stuff. So saw the commercials for the *X Files*, and I thought, that's what I want to do. It's cool, it's interesting, certainly influenced by growing up watching Spielberg doing *Close Encounters*. I got on the *X Files*, and I was just in love with that show.

> "I said, 'If I'm gonna do this, I want to do it really sweet.'"

Absolutely. And Chris Carter made you a staple.
Yeah, I said, "Just keep me shooting this show, because I love it." And here I am again, doing sci-fi. You know, one of the stories I told a while back, I said I just didn't want to do the monster episodes. Because they always show up in some cheap plastic suit, they just look stupid. So I said "Chris, if you could please guide the monster episodes away from me, and just give me the conspiracy stuff, the real compelling intrigue stuff." So I finished the *X Files*, the movie, and I get this script called *Reign of Fire*. I had this weird thing as a kid, I liked dragons... In movie lore, a dragon is a supreme predator. Just the most dangerous creature in movies. You know, I got these little figurines in my house, have had them around for years. I don't really go around telling people about that [laughs]. But I get this script, and there's this notion of soldiers and dragons and castles and tanks, that's an interesting recipe. So I say, what do I do? I don't categorize myself as the sci-fi director, I don't like monsters, I specifically ask not to direct *X Files* monster shows, and hear I go off and direct a dragon movie. So every time I say I'm not a sci fi director, I have nothing to back it up.

Yeah, what are you gonna do.
[laughs] And then I go direct *Elektra*, people can jump around and stuff. I don't know what to tell you. I can't get away from it. **play**

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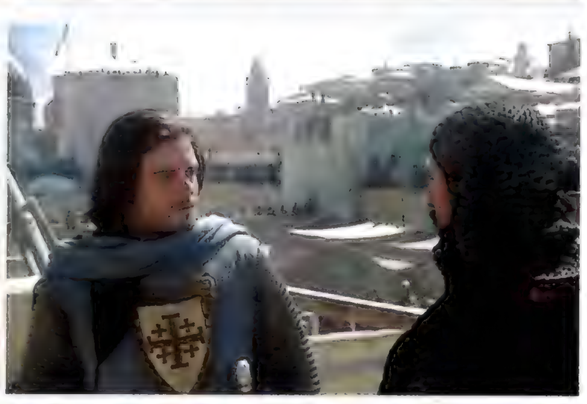
Kingdom of Heaven

Starring: Orlando Bloom, Eva Green, Jeremy Irons, Liam Neeson
Directed by: Ridley Scott
Released By: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment
Rated: R



After seeing it again on DVD I cannot for the life of me figure out why *Kingdom of Heaven* failed at the box office. The cast is spectacular down the line, the story, among the most fascinating turning points in the history of the Middle East, if not the world, and the spectacle, by the modern master of the epic, Ridley Scott, brings a tear to your eye just for seeing it, let alone the score and wonderful pacing of the story. It's not quite *Gladiator* (what is?) but it's of the same pedigree and just as much the spectacle. Nevertheless the DVD is packed with among the best extras I have ever seen including an entire disc of enlightening documentaries to an amazing production "grid" and so much more.
Dave Halverson
Movie: A- Extras: B+

PREVIEW

Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith

Starring: Ewan McGregor, Hayden Christensen, Natalie Portman
Director: George Lucas
Released By: 20th Century Fox
Rated: PG-13

The end of a 30-year-long journey is quickly coming to an end for Star Wars geeks everywhere (including myself!) and RotS is slated to close the door on the world's most beloved sci-fi series. Yes, George Lucas' writing was a little wooden, yes there are some gaping plot holes in the massive arc of the 6-film saga…but it's Star Wars for crying out loud. Anakin Skywalker's first chilling breath as the infamous Darth Vader is something fans won't forget anytime soon, and the DVD Extras plan to walk fans through the processes that made RotS so visually fantastic with over 6 glorious hours of all things behind-the-scenes. Taking viewers on tours through costume, fight choreography, set design, makeup and more, there are so many interesting things happening that it often feels as if you're right in the middle of the chaos. Something slightly amusing (and dare I say unsettling) was watching George plop down a first draft of *Sith's* script…*after* people had been working on sets and costumes for a long while. He even jokes, "I better get working on that script" when he visits the set builders to note their progress. Um, George? Aren't you supposed to have a first draft banged out *before* they build that huge intergalactic opera house?
Ashley Esqueda

The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl

Starring: Taylor Lautner, Taylor Dooley, Cayden Boyd, George Lopez
Director: Robert Rodriguez
Released By: Dimension Home Video
Rated: PG-13

As brilliant and savvy a filmmaker as Robert Rodriguez is, I suppose he's earned the right to create a movie by essentially elaborating on his young son's whimsy (as seen in the curious extras) even though I believe that they may have taken young Racer a bit too literally at times. Getting kids to blurt out fantastic ideas after all is pretty much universal; the problem is (depending on whom you talk to) that much of the time they will involve such things as rivers of chocolate and banana rafts—essentially the part of the film that made me wince. Otherwise, for the most part, like everything Rodriguez does, *Sharkboy and Lavagirl* is fueled with enough of his patented pizzazz to keep anyone firmly glued, 3D glasses at the ready. If nothing else—and the movie is highly entertaining fluff—the 3D effect on a hi-definition screen is as deep as that syrupy river. Dave Halverson
Movie: B Extras: D

Family Guy Presents Stewie Griffin: The Untold Story

Starring: Seth MacFarlane, Alex Borstein, Seth Green
Director: Various
Released By: 20th Century Fox Home Video
Rated: NR

Celebrate the return of the irreverent Family Guy to television with this even more-off-color-than usual Family Guy Presents Stewie Griffin: The Untold Story. Celebrate, that is, if you're a fan. This caustic comedy pays no sensitivity to the politically correct—every one and every thing is a target, with little heart to go along with the ramming. I love it for its absurdity, but with the unhinged humor comes scenes that do fall flat on their face. In this straight-to-video extended episode, Stewie takes off for a road trip to find his real father, going cross country for a chance in scenery. You know what to expect: loose plot, one random joke popping out after another. Brady Fiechter
Movie: B+ Extras: B

The Longest Yard

Starring: Adam Sandler, Chris Rock, Burt Reynolds Nelly
Director: Peter Segal
Released By: MTV/Paramount
Rated: PG-13

I was and remain embarrassed for every last actor (even Nelly) in this steaming turd of a remake… and this from someone that really liked *Little Nicky*. Reynolds is given such crap to say and act it's a wonder he didn't die of humiliation on the set, and literally everything else is as bad or worse. I can't imagine how anyone could even make a movie this cliché and awful, let alone get wide distribution to spread the disease. What's wrong with America? This made three times what *Kingdom of Heaven* did!? There is nothing even remotely good here, just the utter trashing of a good film. The extras are plenty deep but they just made me more angry. That they actually thought they were making a good film hurts my brain. Sandler, Chris Rock, Burt Reynolds, Nelly… Dave Halverson
Movie: F Extras: Who cares?

Going Ape with the Gorillaz

From deep within the reaches of their top-secret Kong Studios, an encrypted communication arrived at the doorstep of Play. After checking to make sure that it was not booby-trapped, our brave scribe opened the message to reveal ruminations from the members of one of the universes most cryptic and influential collections of musicians around—The Gorillaz. Members Noodle (guitar), 2D (vocals), Russel (hip-hop lyricist) and Murdoc (bass) shared their thoughts with Play, in a rare interview filled with international espionage and religious intrigue.

By Lucas Mast and Dave Halverson

Play: Do you create with your animated counterparts specifically in mind, or just create the music you'd be making regardless and bring in the (animated) band afterwards?
Noodle: Music is the key foundation of every good group. If the music doesn't work then everything else falls apart. Gorillaz are an animated band, but like most musicians we're not conscious of ourselves when we record. The music is far bigger, far greater than the state of the people who make it.

2D: I'm not sure that Chubby Checker would agree on that one. I think if he wasn't aware of his…size, then the music would be totally different.

Murdoc: Yeah, Noodle, I'm not sure that Ozzy Osbourne would agree with that either. I think most musicians are completely aware of themselves when they record. I mean he's like the Lord of Darkness! If he doesn't make a black-rock Satanic corker, then his whole game is over.

Noodle: Ok, well, maybe because Gorillaz present themselves so uniquely, we may seem to be the exception to the rule. The Gorillaz music is made without the preconception of videos or artwork in mind. We simply make the songs sound right, let them breathe and come alive.

How did the opportunities to work with iTunes come about?
Murdoc: Hey…I..err.. I don't really get involved with all the paperwork issues. But you know, people just keep phoning us up and suggesting ways we could work together. iTunes seems like a great label so we got together with them. The stitching is fantastic.

Noodle: I have been downloading music from the Internet since Napster was in nappies. It was always obvious that this was the way music would progress. So I feel we should be guiding the future into the present maybe…a little faster. When the opportunity came up to work with iTunes...we took it. It's one of our finest collaborations.

2D: Since I got my iPod I can actually move around my room again.

Murdoc: Yeah, but all the music you listen to's crap. You should have dumped all those CD's straight in the bin.

Can you offer any insight into other members that might be joining Gorillaz, either as guests or regular members?
Murdoc: Listen, no-one else is joining this band. And no-one leaves except in a box. There's people we might collaborate with, but at the moment I'd say we've really used up the cream of the crop on 'Demon Days'.

Noodle: Hmm…I'm thinking that for the next album we should grow our own collaborators, in a tube. Like, Collaborator clones.

Murdoc: Despite the fact that I despise 2D like the plague, this band is made up of these four original members, and they're irreplaceable. I hate it when bands lose pivotal members and then continue under the same name. It's just a big con.

Play: The new Kidrobot vinyls are amazing, exuding a level of quality in line with your videos and DVD. Will we see more branding this time around? The characters seem primed for Adult Swim, and more over, video games. If so are they making sure to stay in the approvals loop to assure the quality is there?
Noodle: Nothing ever leaves the Gorillaz HQ without getting approval from us. Nothing. Not an advert, not a CD, not a single poster. That's why Gorillaz come across so well. We don't delegate or

"Despite the fact that I despise 2D like the plague, this band is made up of these four original members, and they're irreplaceable."

Murdoc

outsource our art.

2D: I'd like to see a game of us. It'd be amazing to see what we would look like if we were digitised, like…animated version of ourselves.

Russel: You still don't get it, D, do you?

Noodle: Whatever we do would in that area, we'd definitely have to oversee.

Play: How much additional time does the animation take preparation-wise for a newrelease? Essentially nailing two mediums at once the timing must be interesting.
Noodle: When Jamie Hewlett and Pete Candeland shoot our videos, the time from initial shots to the finished product is normally about 3 months. So much of the detail has to be hand drawn, plus there's the CG elements, then the after-effects, the lighting then the rendering. Each of our videos is like making…well, a mini-movie.

Murdoc: Well, for Feelgood Inc vid, I just turned up a little fuzzy, took my top off, danced around with my bass looking great and then left. It only took my 2 hours. But obviously being a pro I work faster than people like Jamie and Passion Pictures.

Noodle: Passion Pictures are the people that put together our videos with Jamie and Peter. And Murdoc doesn't know what he's talking about.

Who would the Gorillaz like to work with (either collaboration or tour with?)
Murdoc: I think it would be great to team up with Lemmy from Motorhead.

Russel: I don't know, er…someone like Steve Reich would be interesting. He was experimenting with piano and rhythm loops for a long time before samplers were even invented. Maybe Jim Thirwell, Alec Empire or the Aphex Twin, if you're looking at something fierce and noisy. I like Fourtet's work. And maybe someone with a cinematic quality like John Barry or Ennio Morricone would be a cool collaboration. We look to those people for influence a lot anyway so it would be great to do a remix or something with someone who didn't really use re-mixing as their main tool, you know. That way you run the risk of ending up with something truly original.

Have you created substantially more for animated content for Demon Days?
Noodle: There have been more acceptance speeches. And also the quality of the animation in our videos has certainly increased since the last album, because of the advances in technology. And sometimes our imaginations can run away with us…

You guys into or inspired by anime? If so, what are you fans of? What about games?
Noodle: *Spirited Away* by the Japanese animation studio Studio Ghibli, is one of my favorites. You can see an influence of their work on the Feelgood Inc. video. Also I've been a big fan of the film *Akira*. Games-wise I think it's Halo and Resident Evil that really do it for me.

Russel: Our base Kong Studios became infested with zombies during our absence, so when Noodle returned from Japan, all her computer game practice really paid off in terms of clearing the corridors of the…walking undead.

Noodle: It took about six months to empty it of all the carcasses. For a while it was a real life version of 'Resident Evil'.

Play: With Demon Days a definitive sound has emerged the like that we seldom hear these days. The new material with Danger Mouse, and MF Doom (as much as we loved the debut) seems more nuanced and is incredibly diverse. What's your process like? Do you sit down and just write or is it a more free form creative process? Do you guys spend a lot of time together experimenting?
Noodle: All music is an experiment; there is no definite repeatable formula that guarantees a good outcome. But the usual process begins with me sketching out tunes, melodies and ideas using just a guitar and a four-track machine. We then go into the studio and having put the rough idea into Pro-Tools, we begin adding a rhythm or maybe some other instruments... bass lines...keyboard lines. From there it's a process of recording, editing, re-recording, scrapping ideas, bringing in other musicians etc. And then one day you wake up and your song is…fully grown.

Russel: Dangermouse and Noodle worked very well together in terms of being able to bounce ideas between the two of them. One will suggest a pattern or texture and the other will instinctively anticipate whether that sound is going to be…relevant to that song. And also whether that song is going to be relevant to that album.

Murdoc: Well… I think it's my bass-lines that really make the album work.

Play: Have you considered Holographic concerts for the future? Seems like a no-brainer.
Murdoc: A no-brainer!? Great! Bring it on! All that thinking makes my head hurt.

Noodle: We do have a world tour planned. It's gonna be really, really exciting. It's taking time to put it together as the technology is quite groundbreaking but as soon as we have the details we'll let you know.

Murdoc: But you can be guaranteed it's gonna knock your socks off. There's gonna be full-on rock, fantastic visuals, me on bass, and a whole jaw-dropping spectacular stage show. Unmissable.

2D: You sound like P.T. Barnum.

Play: The Beach Boys meets Gorillaz 'Don't Get Lost in Here' running into 'Demon Days' is practically euphoric. It's like a ray of sunshine at disc's end and p-much a departure from the rest of your music. Is there anything to it, or is it just that: a little ray of sunshine?
Noodle: That 'little ray of sunshine' goes a long way. Without that, the rest of the record makes no sense. It balances the whole album, and it's also the album's pay-off. The rest of the record is a description of the darkness, and of the volatile times that surround us. The track 'Demon Days' is the….antidote. Without it the rest of the album collapses into hopeless misery. That track leaves you looking optimistically to the future, which can only be a good thing.

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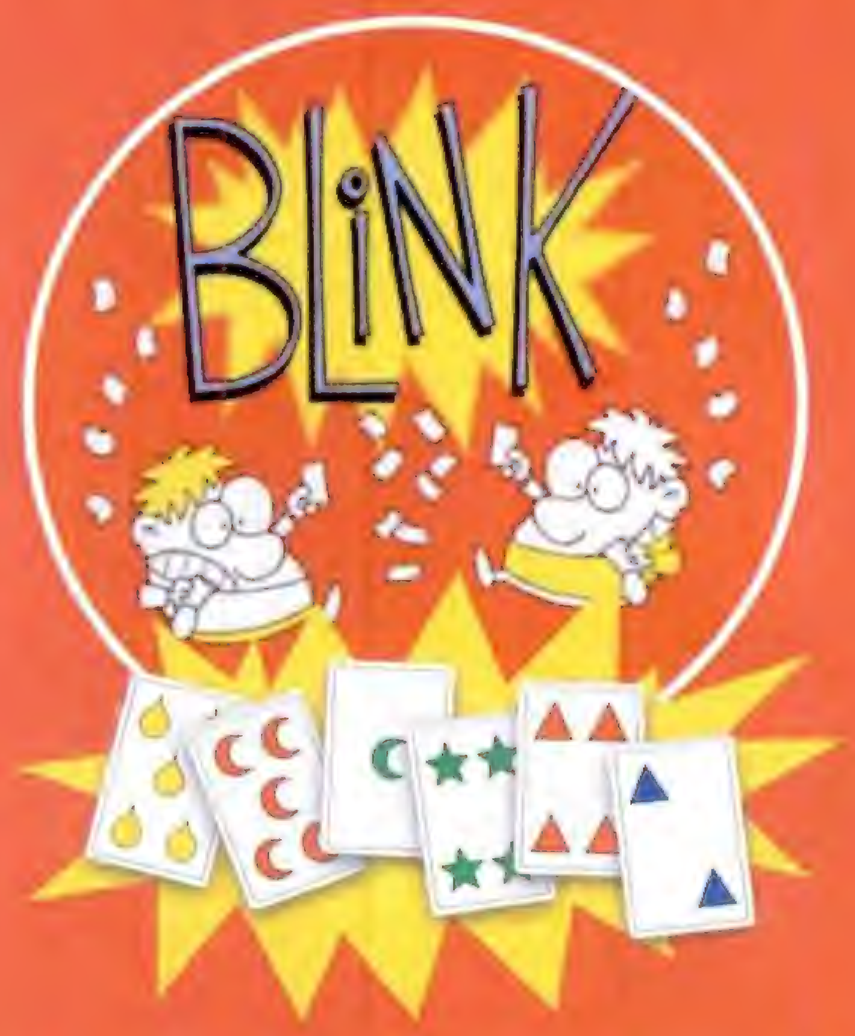

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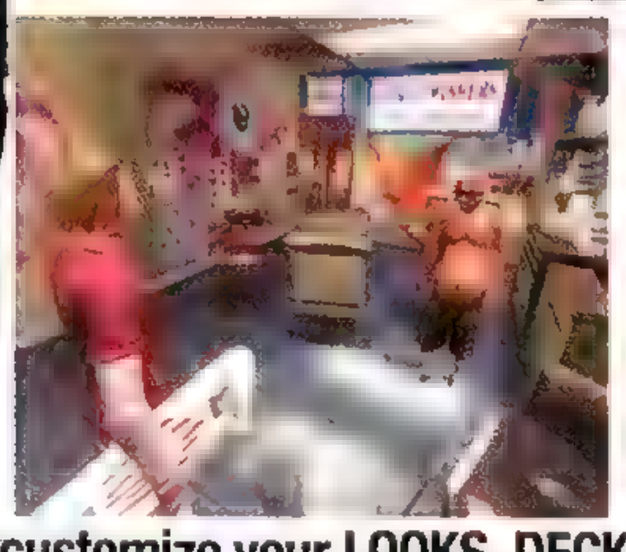

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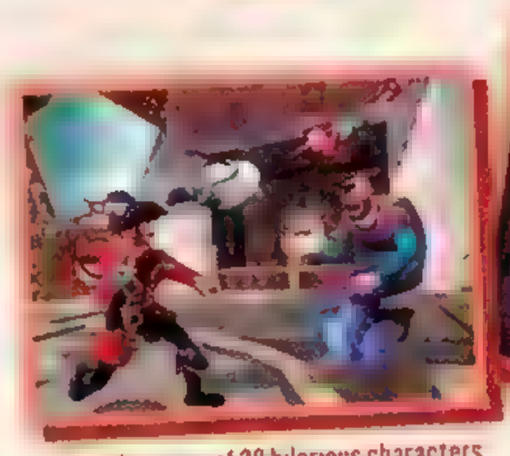

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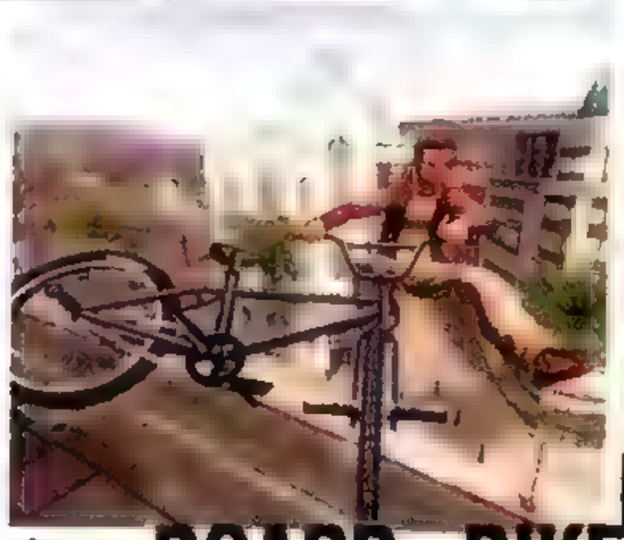

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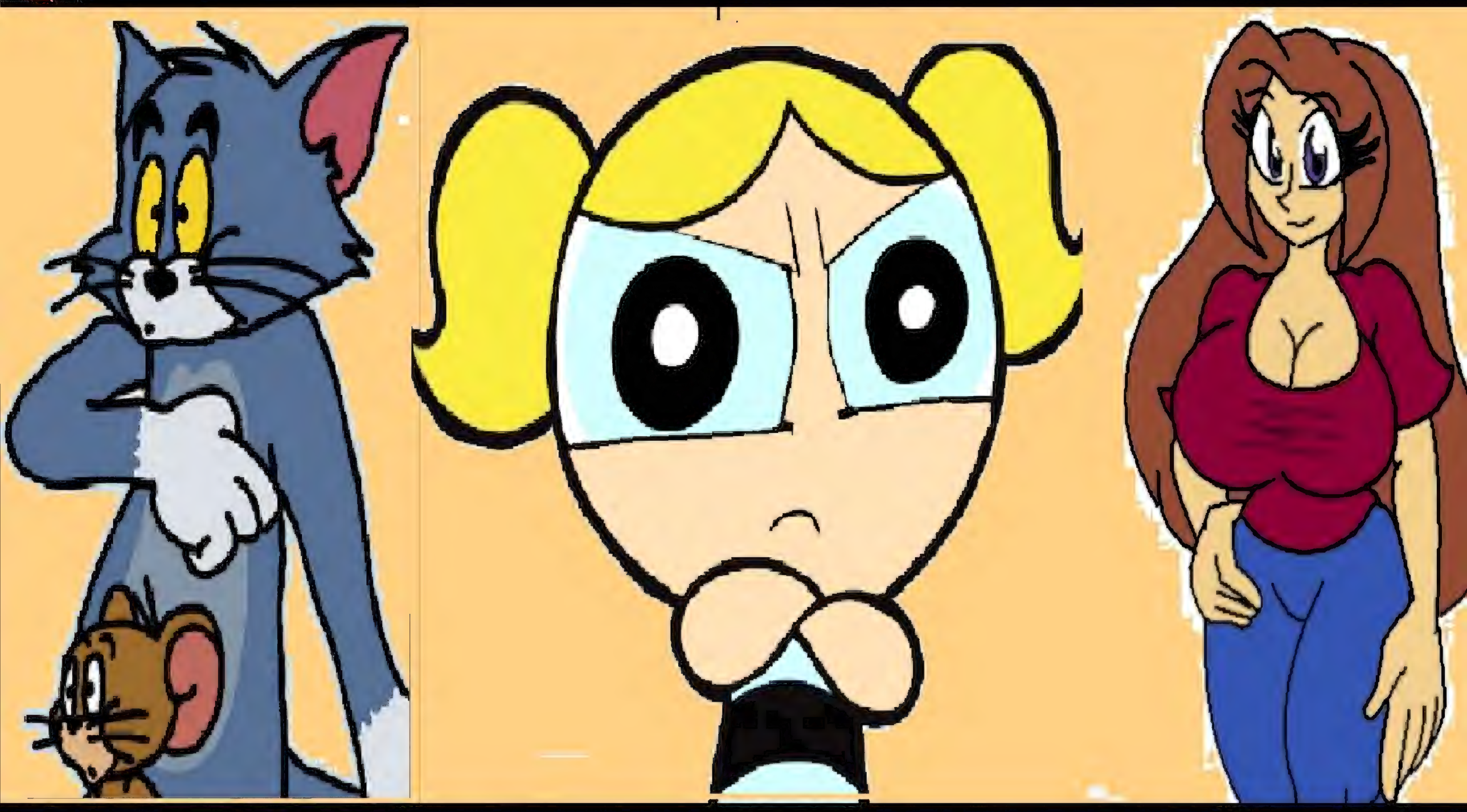

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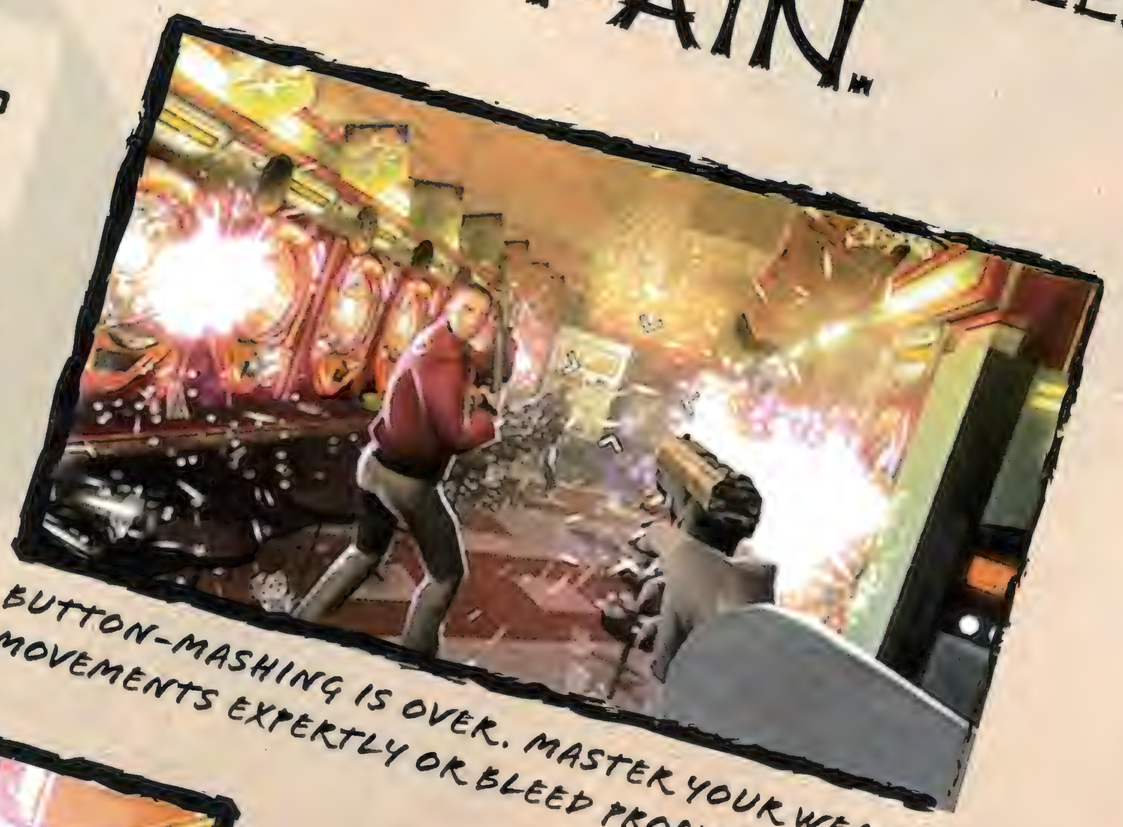

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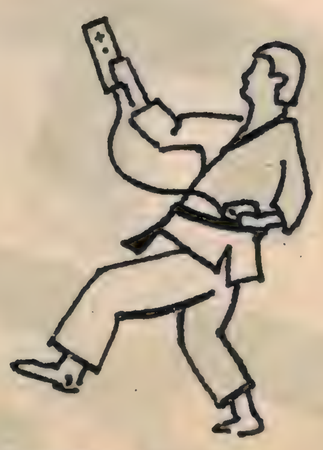

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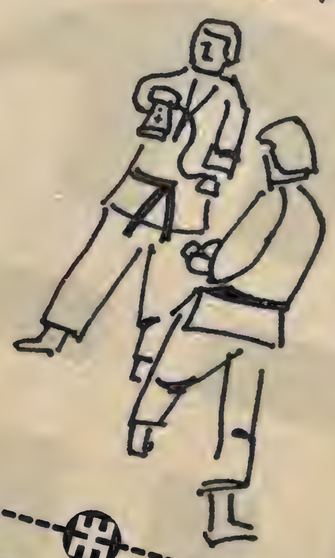

HEAD-TO-HEAD

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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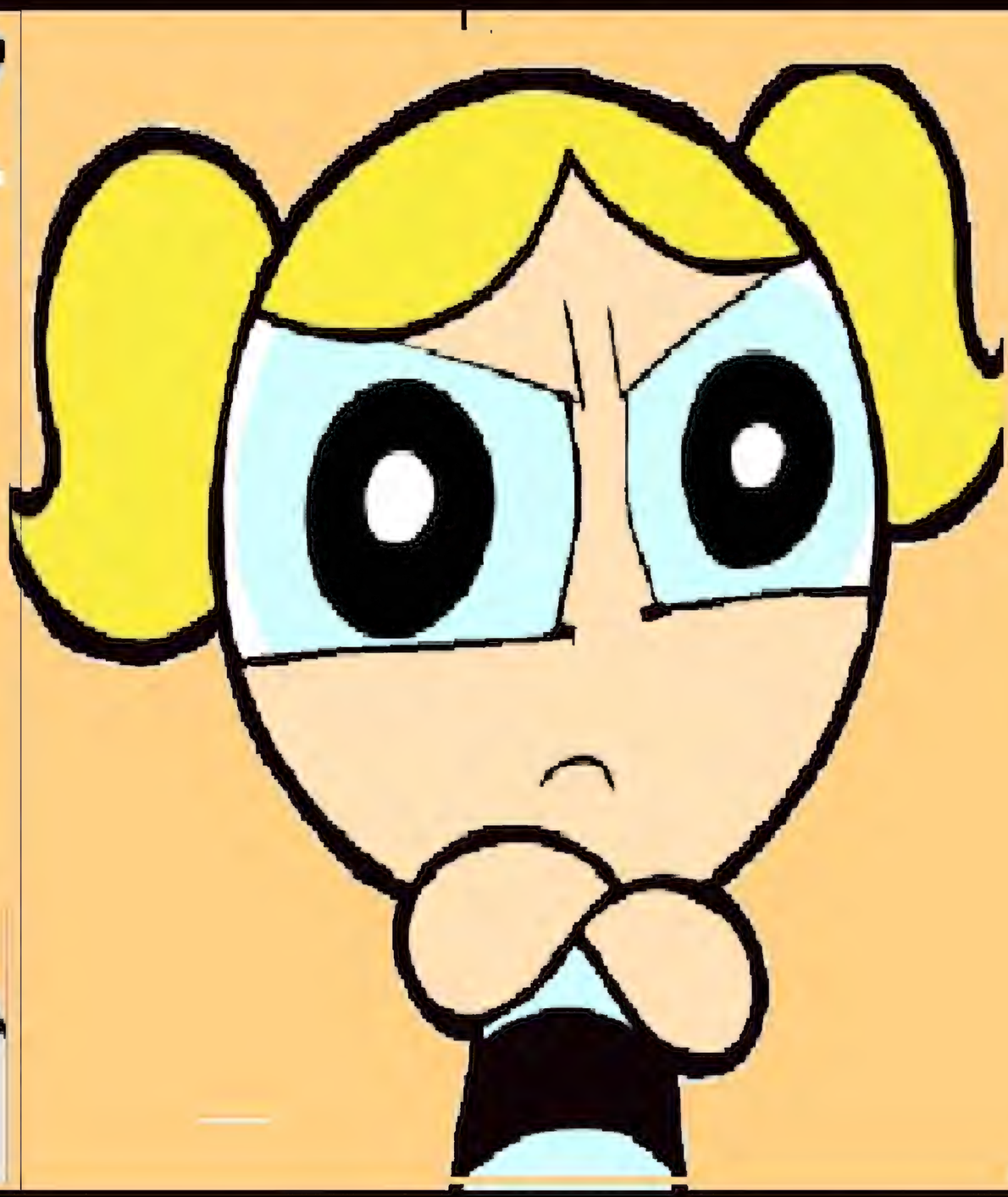

Ms. Pacman
Galaxian
Dig Dug
Pole Position 2
Phozon
The Tower of Druaga
Assault
Genpei Tōma Den
Ordyne
Pac-Land
The Return of Ishtar

tom and jerry bubbles and the girl gene deitch alaska comic-con

PlayStation 2

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NINTENDO DS

EVERYBODY

E

Cartoon Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon Violence

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— PLAY magazine*

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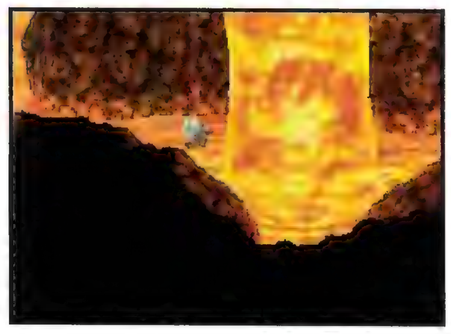
* PLAY Magazine, October 2006

4
CHARACTERS

23
JOB CLASSES

FOUR SOULS SHALL BE BLESSED WITH LIGHT, AND SO IT SHALL BEGIN…



- A dynamic job system brings a nearly infinite number of party variations. Each character can assume any of 23 jobs found throughout the adventure.
- Enlist the aid of allies, providing guidance and added support in battle.
- Unlock hidden challenges and items, and message your friends using the Mognet wireless feature.

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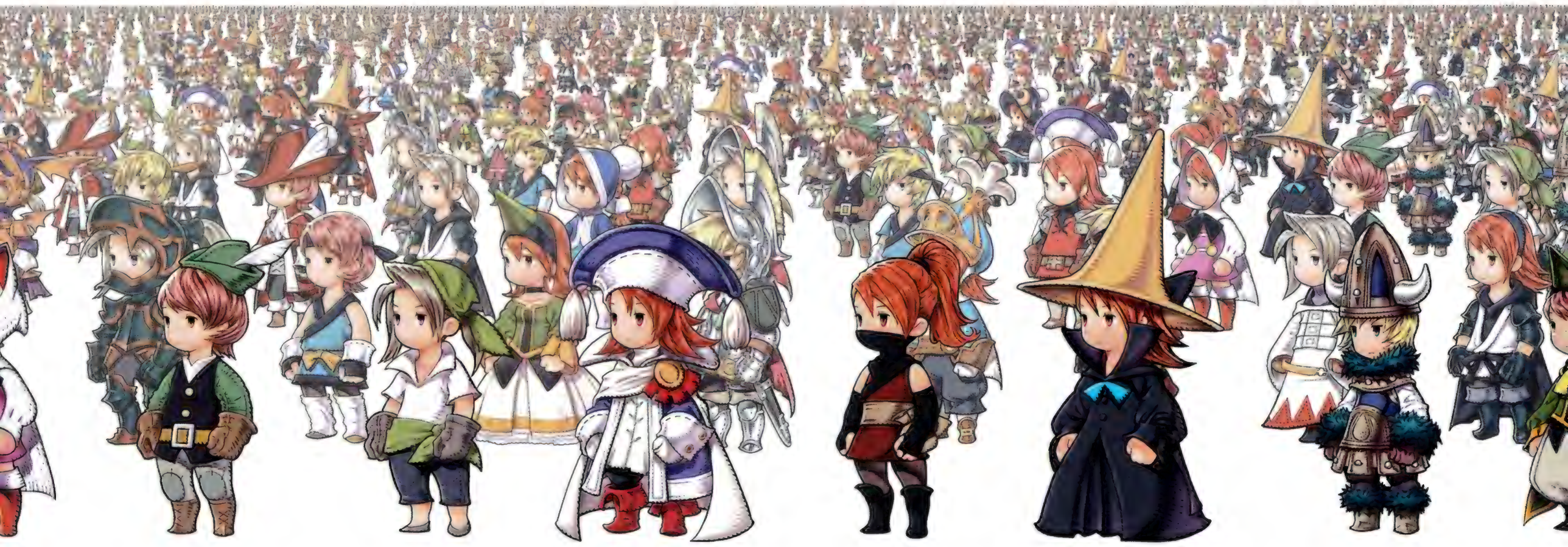
NOVEMBER 14, 2006

279,841

POSSIBLE PARTY CONFIGURATIONS



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Fantasy Violence
Mild Blood
Suggestive Themes

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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NINTENDO DS™

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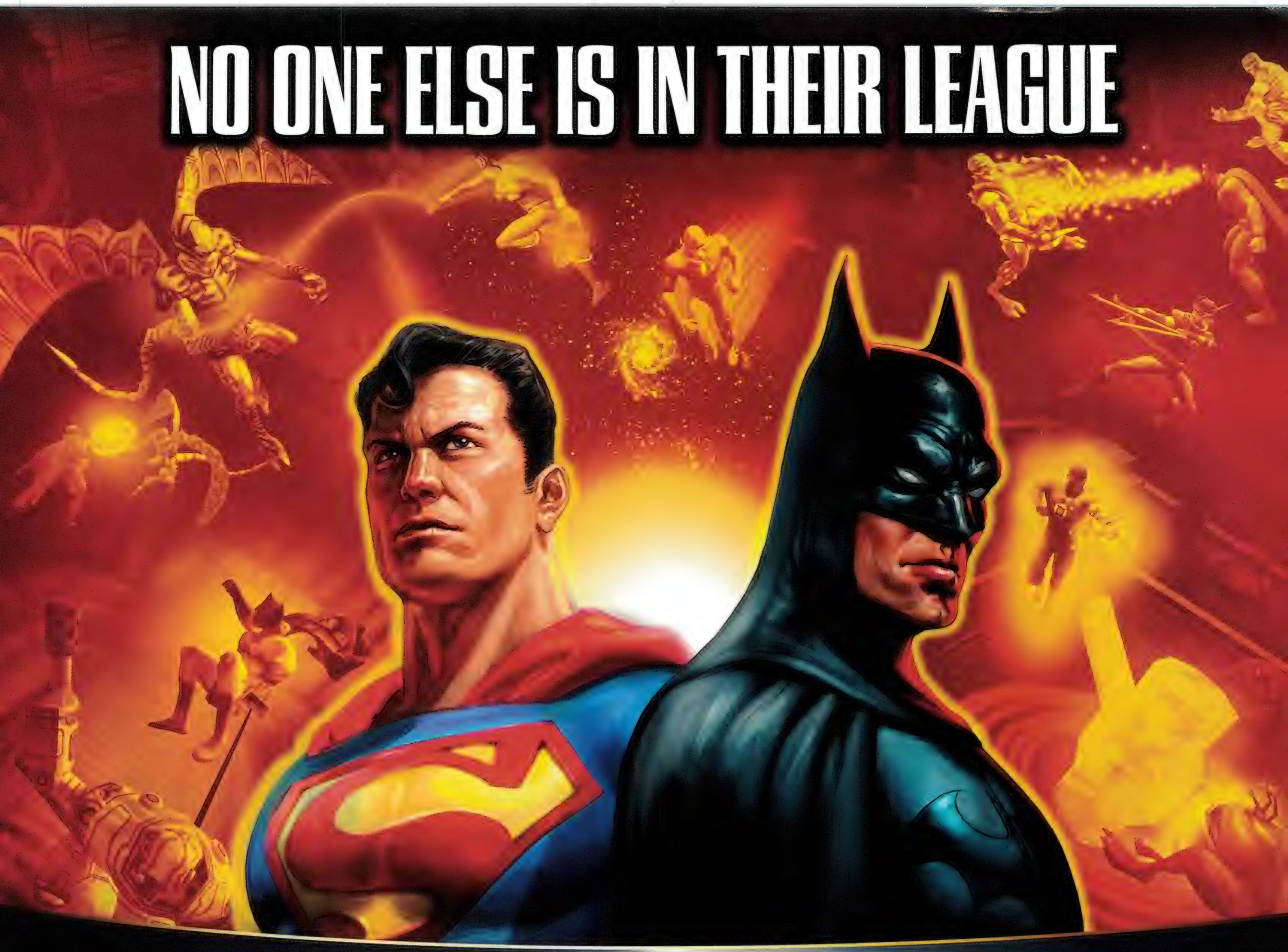
An original cover by Kojima Productions

Cover 2
Crackdown
An original cover by Dany Orizio

NO ONE ELSE IS IN THEIR LEAGUE



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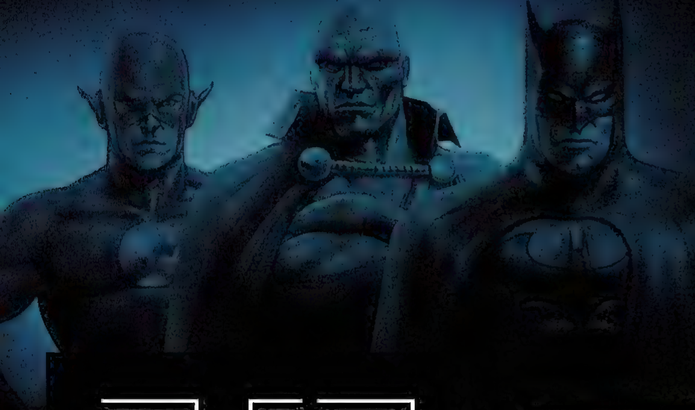

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(s06)

playback

November 2006

letters@playmagzine.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

New Dog Old Tricks?

Concerning the Nintendo Wii, I applaud Nintendo for the idea of including the online back catalogue of retro gaming. It is just too little too late. This would have been great if it was 5 years ago and Nintendo was on the brink of launching the Gamecube. Google any emulation forum and anyone will tell you that people have been playing our old favorites for years and in high res to boot. The problem is, that people like me who love these old school games probably already have them. Either they have the original game on the original console or with a PC, Dreamcast, or modded Xbox and the hundreds of emulators available on the internet.

So basically Nintendo is offering something that is already free. According to the emulation laws if I have the original copy of Streets of Rage 2 on Genesis, I am allowed to own the rom and play it on my Dreamcast, Xbox, or PC. So is Nintendo going to make me pay for a game I already own or will they have some sort of serial number input to get it for free? And what about all the compilations that have been out these past 2 years. You can get all the arcade perfect ports of Street Fighter 2 turbo and Mortal Kombats. And um….who really needs another way to play Sonic the Hedgehog? Ooh, I can get it on my cell phone! Yeah, stop the presses!

Joe Parker
Gamertag: Knuckle2k

The horror

After listening to Higurashi No Naku Koro Ni (I ain't even a horror fan and this disturbing series is now my favorite anime!) I was wondering if you could incorporate some presentation of Japan-only-anime-with-few-chances-to-get-release-over-here in your anime section (Like the one mentioned in the beginning). I think It might be a good idea to make people aware of some great series so maybe they'll one day come out here. Anyway, even if you don't do it, it won't keep you from being the best north-American mag, thanks for your amazing interview (The Darkness' one was really great) and your accurate review (I never saw in all my life a mag who got so close to what I thought about certain game). Keep up the good work!
EC

The 868 Gamer March!

All Gamer Alert!
I'm trying to get the word out! TGS '06 announced a PlayStation 2 version of Chain of Memories. Since then alot of Kingdom Hearts fans want COM to come to the U.S.A and have created a Kingdom Hearts COM online Petition. I recently signed the petition myself. The goal of the petition is to have COM released in the U.S.A. I believe the current number of signatures is 868 (this number I hope will rise!).

We are **NOT** requesting for the Japanese Kingdom Hearts 2: Final Mix to come to the U.S BUT to have only Chain of Memories.
For more info on the petition and other ways of helping visit:
http://www.khinsider.com/news2/headlines/161168046.shtml
if the above URL is too difficult please visit: http://www.khinsider.com *and look under "KH2:FM + Re: CoM Petition/Contact Campaign" posted on 09/25/2006*
Here is a copy of the petition:

To: Square-Enix
We are a group of fans for the Kingdom Hearts franchise, by Square-Enix. On September 13th, 2006, we discovered that there was to be a Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix, and, more importantly, bundled with it, a remake of the Gameboy Advance filler game, Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories.

Many of us are concerned that this game will not be localized and translated for international fans' benefits.

Kingdom Hearts I: Final Mix was never translated or localized, and we fully understand that the Final Mix version was made to give the Japanese players content that the international players were given - the bonus battle with Sephiroth, for example. With Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix sometime in the future, we are all doubting whether the vast majority of us will be able to play or not. Many of us are not able to modify our consoles, or import games.

Because of this, we are concerned that we may be missing out. The Kingdom Hearts series has gained an innumerable amount of fans since the arrival of Kingdom Hearts II, and many of us would love to be able to buy it and enjoy it.

While we understand the Final Mix versions are intended to be bonus incentives for Japanese players, we feel, that there is a sufficient market to warrant localization. We understand, too, that a great deal of effort goes into recording voices for games, and should this be too much of a demand, we will gladly accept a subtitled game.

We hope that Square-Enix will consider translating and localizing the Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories remake.

We wish you good luck on your future endeavors. Thank you for many, many hours of fun.
Sincerely,
The Unsigned

Also We hope that PSP fans will also sign up, this is a HUGE Opportunity for those with PS2's and also only own the PSP to play Chain of Memories.

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Wii™

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Wii™

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Wii Are One

Nintendo debuts new console in three separate worldwide events

On a muggy, rainy morning in New York City, Nintendo of America's president Reggie Fils-Amis took aim at his competitors Sony and Microsoft, and fired.

"MSRP: $249. One price, one configuration, one color: white."

Fils-Amis and Nintendo had come to New York's Chelsea Piers to unveil the Wii game console. To do the job properly, Nintendo held three separate events worldwide in the span of roughly 48 hours; the New York unveiling had been preceded by an event in Tokyo, and was followed by a gathering in London.

Although anticipation was high, the news that initially filtered out from Nintendo's New York press conference came as a surprise to no one. The New York Times had leaked information about the console's specifics on its Web site hours before the event: The Wii would launch on November 19 in the United States, a full 13 days before the console's December 2 debut in Japan. The console would clock in at $249 and come packaged with one Wii remote and one nunchuk controller, as well as the five-game compilation Wii Sports.

More than 30 Wii titles will see release by year's end, Fils-Amis said, with about 15 or so appearing on November 19. In addition to first-party releases such as The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Battalion Wars II, Super Mario Galaxy, Big Brain Academy, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, and Wario Ware: Smooth Moves, Nintendo also touted releases from third-party developers Activision, Atari, Atlus, Electronic Arts, Konami, Majesco, Midway, Sega, THQ, Ubisoft, and Vivendi Universal. At the event, third-party Wii titles such as Activision's Marvel: Ultimate Alliance and Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam, Atlus' Trauma Center: Second Opinion, Konami's Elebits, Electronic Arts' Madden NFL 2007, and Ubisoft's Rayman Raving Rabbids and Red Steel were playable, and prominently displayed alongside the Nintendo-made games.

You will have to find a spot for the sensor bar, but Nintendo has made it as unobtrusive as technically possible

"It's a great system, with a great game library," Fils-Amis said. "But you knew I'd say that."

Fils-Amis said, "Our strategy is based on one core belief: That the next step in gaming is bringing gaming back to the masses. It is literally that simple; appealing to current gamers as well as broadening that industry to new gamers, people who today don't even consider themselves in the gaming industry."

"Our mantra is, satisfy current players in new ways. Re-engage former players. Most importantly, grow the market to new players," he said.

At the conference, Nintendo chose not to emphasize the Wii's specifications, but rather the console's unique two-handed, lightgun-style control scheme, and what the Wii could do in terms of attracting an audience. To this end, the company announced the creation of Wii channels, a series of options people can access through the game console.

Fils-Amis called these Wii channels a pied piper of sorts. "We believe it can alter the relationship between everyone in the household and their TV screen. It's not just virtual console, but a total effort to redefine who will use video games in the future," he said.

"Our challenge was to find a universal appeal for Wii," he told the 200 or so journalists who were in attendance for the event. Wii channels can be accessed when the Wii is connected to a television and left in standby mode. Twelve channels will be available initially, but this number can and will grow as time goes on.

"Our strategy is based on one core belief: That the next step in gaming is bringing gaming back to the masses"- Reggie Fils-Amis

The disc channel allows players to play both Wii and GameCube titles. Another channel lets players create their own tiny virtual humans called Miis. Miis can be customized, stored within a Wii remote, and taken to a friend's house. Individual characters created in the Mii channel can also be used within gameplay in titles such as Wario Ware: Smooth Moves and Wii Sports. A photo channel lets players access, share, and manipulate photos; the console has a built-in slot that accepts SD memory cards from digital cameras. With an Internet connection, Wii users can access both news and weather channels that will be updated constantly. A separate Internet channel gives Wii users access to the information superhighway via the Web browser Opera. Messages and photos can be sent via a special message channel, and Nintendo promises players will be able to access game-specific news such as updates for existing titles or release dates for new ones.

Downloadable content such as classic video games from the Sega Genesis, Turbo Grafx 16, Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES), and the Nintendo 64 can be purchased via special "Wii points" on the Wii shop channel. Users will also be able to purchase Wii points at retail, as well as on the shop channel, at an exchange rate of $1 for 100 points.

As it stands now, downloaded NES titles will cost 500 points, SNES offerings 800 points, and Nintendo 64 games 1,000 points ($5, $8, $10, respectively). Downloaded titles will appear as separate channels, and are stored within the Wii's internal memory. Three of these "virtual console" titles will be available at launch, Fils-Amis said: Super Mario 64, the NES' The Legend of Zelda, and Super Mario World for the SNES. He also promised 30 virtual console titles by year's end and, starting in January, 10 classic games a month until the end of the year.

In addition, Fils-Amis said Wii users will be able to access Nintendo's Wi-Fi connection gaming service via their consoles, and the Wii will be able to communicate wirelessly to the Internet, even when its power is shut off—the company calls this mode WiiConnect24. No mention was made of when titles featuring online competitive or cooperative play would be released, but Fils-Amis suggested such games, notably Battalion Wars II and Pokémon Battle Revolution are certainly forthcoming.

In response to Sony's manufacturing problems with the PlayStation 3 and its recent decision to delay the console's launch in Europe, Fils-Amis promised four million Wii consoles would be shipped in the 43 days between November 19 and December 31, with the bulk of that number going to the North American market.

The Wii, at a Glance

Wii Nintendo's upcoming home video game console. According to a Nintendo-released style guide, "It is simply Wii, not Nintendo Wii. It is pronounced 'we,' indicating its all-inclusive nature. The name works best at the beginning of declarative statements."

Cost $249, U.S dollars

Controls A Wii remote controller, which resembles a television remote control and a nunchuk device comprise Wii's control scheme. Up to four Wii remote controllers can be connected at once using wireless Bluetooth technology. The wireless signal can be detected within 10 meters of the console. Both the Wii remote and nunchuk controllers include a three-axis motion sensor. The Wii remote controller also includes a speaker, rumble feature and expansion port, and can be used as a pointer within five meters of the screen. The Wii remote controller has a power switch, plus pad, and six gameplay and function buttons: A, B, Minus, Home, 1, and 2. The nunchuk controller includes an analog control stick and C and Z gameplay buttons.

Discs The Wii accepts and plays both 12-centimeter optical Wii discs and 8-centimeter GameCube discs.

Specifications and other features The Wii console has 512 megabytes of internal flash memory, two USB 2.0 ports, and built-in Wi-Fi capability. A bay for an SD memory card lets players expand the internal flash memory. Design was optimized with state-of-the-art processing technologies that minimize power consumption, keep the console compact, and enable the "sleepless" WiiConnect24 mode.

In addition, the Wii has four ports for classic Nintendo GameCube controllers; two slots for Nintendo GameCube Memory Cards; and an AV multi-output port for component, composite or S-video.

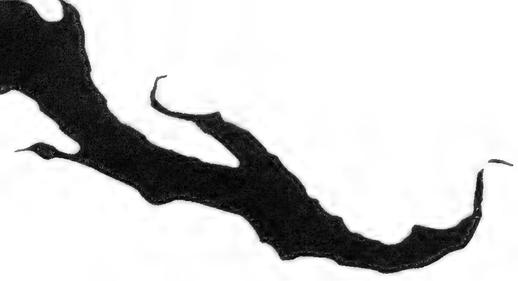
First Party Games

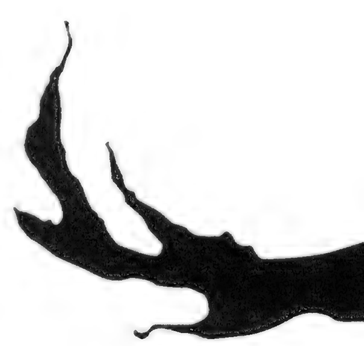
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess
Nintendo

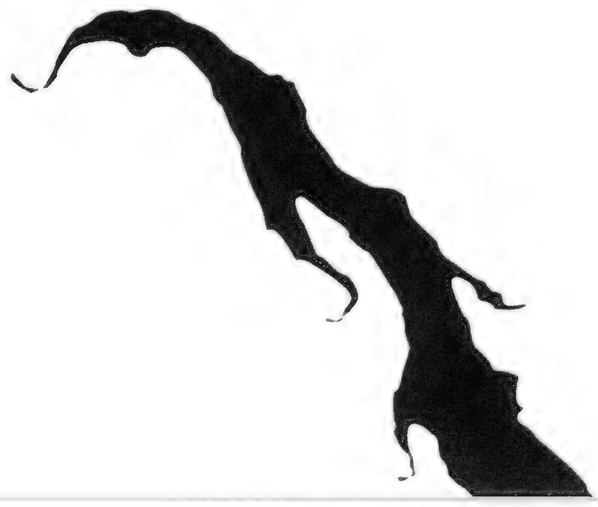
Wii Sports (bundled)
Nintendo

Super Mario Galaxy
Nintendo

continued...







Wii, Hands-on

Attendees at Nintendo's September 14 press event in New York City were treated to more than just details of the Wii's impending launch. After Nintendo of America's president Reggie Fils-Amis was done introducing the console, everyone was invited to go and play the Wii.

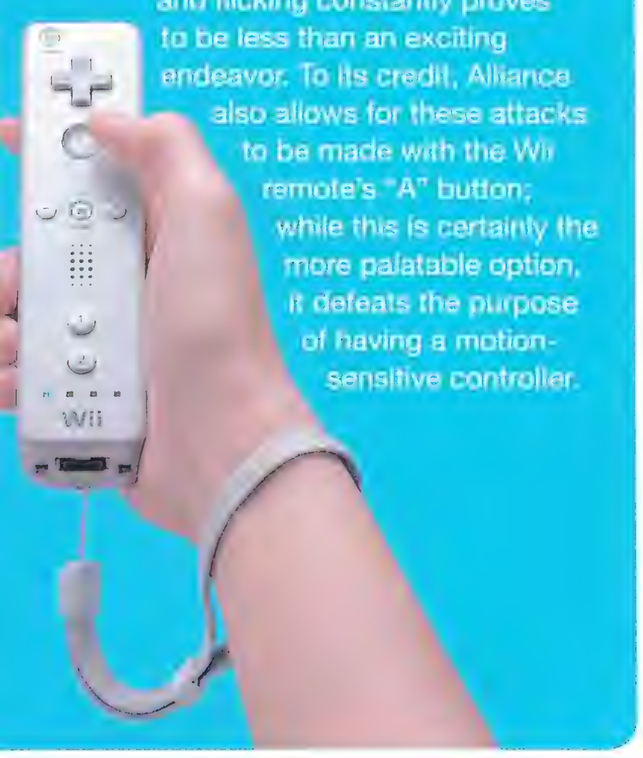
Approximately 20 titles were playable at the event, including The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Battalion Wars II, Wario Ware: Smooth Moves, Excite Truck, and Wii Sports. Third-party titles such as Madden NFL Football 2007, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, Trauma Center: Second Opinion, and Super Monkey Ball Banana Blitz were also represented.

Here, it was made clear: The Wii is a lot of fun to play. The play area was tightly packed with journalists, photographers, and news cameras, and more than one passerby was inadvertently struck by someone swinging the Wii's controllers.

Yet some questions remain. The Wii is reliant on its unique control scheme, and it remains to be seen how well the bulk of the console's titles will effectively utilize it.

Games such as Wii Sports, which uses the Wii remote to replicate swings of a tennis racket or baseball bat, punches thrown by a boxer, or bowling ball tosses, and Wario Ware, where players need to align the controller in a series of different ways in order to beat a rapid-fire succession of minigames, made excellent use of the Wii's controls.

Other titles, however, required repetitive motions that, while intriguing for brief periods of time, might not hold up during extended play sessions. Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, for example, requires players to flick the Wii's remote in order to get their superhero to perform a basic attack. The game requires a near-endless series of these attacks, and flicking constantly proves to be less than an exciting endeavor. To its credit, Alliance also allows for these attacks to be made with the Wii remote's "A" button; while this is certainly the more palatable option, it defeats the purpose of having a motion-sensitive controller.



First Party Games (cont.)

Wii

Metroid Prime 3 Corruption
Nintendo

Battalion Wars 2
Nintendo

Big Brain Academy
Nintendo

Mario Strikers Charged
Nintendo

WarioWare Smooth Moves
Nintendo

Excite Truck
Nintendo

Third Party Games

Wii

Dragonball Z
Atari

Chicken Little Ace in Action
Buena Vista

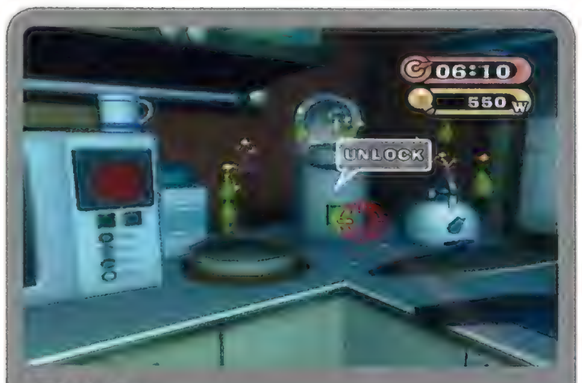
Red Steel
Ubisoft

continued...

Third Party Games (cont.)

Wii

Rayman Raving Rabbids
Ubisoft



Elebits
Konami

Madden NFL 07
Electronic Arts

Marvel Ultimate Alliance
Activision

Super Monkey Ball BB
Sega

Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam
Activision

Sonic and the Secret Rings
Sega

Trauma Center Second Opinon
Atlus

www.TheDarknessIsSpreading.com

Database

November 2006

FF VII: Dirge of Cerberus
Square Enix/PS2

Despite mixed reviews Dirge of Cerberus made its Top 10 debut.

Madden NFL 07
EA/Xbox 360, PS2, PC, Xbox

What a surprise! John Madden endorsed a Football game and just look at it go! EA may be onto something!

Yakuza
Sega / PS2

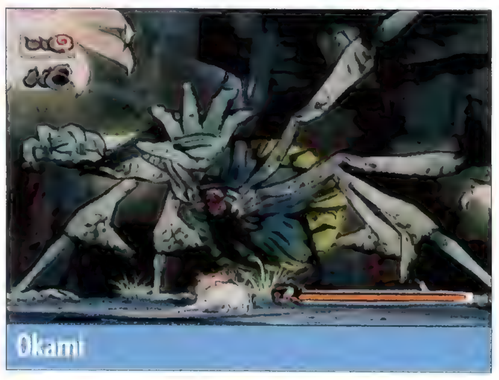
The Japanese underworld snakes its way into the USA and lands Sega back in the Top 5.

	NPD Group Top Ten July Game Sales
01	**Madden NFL 07** EA / PS2
02	**Madden NFL 07** EA / Xbox 360
03	**Dead Rising** Capcom / Xbox 360
04	**Madden NFL 07** EA / Xbox
05	**Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of Cerberus** Square Enix / PS2
06	**New Super Mario Bros.** Nintendo / NDS
07	**NCAA Football 07** EA / Xbox
08	**Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories** Rockstar / PS2
09	**Brain Age: Train Your Brain In Minutes** Nintendo / NDS
10	**Ninety-Nine Nights** Microsoft / Xbox 360

Madden NFL 07

Ninety-Nine Nights

	Reader Top 5
01	**Okami** Capcom / PS2
02	**Yakuza** Sega / PS2
03	**Ultimate Ghosts 'n' Goblins** Capcom / PSP
04	**Dead Rising** Capcom / Xbox 360
05	**Saints Row** THQ / Xbox 360

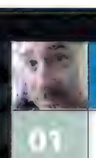


Okami

	Reader Most Wanted
01	**FF XII** Square Enix / PS2
02	**Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** Nintendo GC/Wii
03	**Metal Gear Solid 4** Konami/PS3
04	**Halo 3** Microsoft/Xbox 360
05	**Fable 2** Microsoft/Xbox 360

Final Fantasy XII

play magazine Editor Top 5/Now Playing



Dave Halverson

01	**Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil** Konami / PSP
02	**Ninety-Nine Nights** Microsoft / Xbox 360
03	**Lunar Knights** Konami / NDS
04	**Enchanted Arms** Ubisoft / Xbox 360
05	**Ultimate Ghosts 'n' Goblins** Capcom / PSP

Brady Fiechter

01	**Dead Rising** Capcom / Xbox 360
02	**Yakuza** Sega / PS2
03	**Lost Planet** Capcom / Xbox 360
04	**Mario Hoops 3-on-3** Nintendo / NDS
05	**Mario Vs Donkey Kong 2** Nintendo / NDS

Greg Orlando

01	**Civilization IV** 2K Games / Macintosh
02	**Lego Star Wars II: TOT** LucasArts / Xbox 360
03	**Mario Hoops 3-on-3** Nintendo / NDS
04	**Final Fantasy XII** Square Enix / PS2
05	**WTF: Work Time Fun** D3Publisher / PSP

Casey Loe

01	**Tales of the Abyss** Bandai Namco Games / PS2
02	**Final Fantasy III** Square Enix / NDS
03	**Dead Rising** Capcom / Xbox 360
04	**Final Fantasy XII** Square Enix / PS2
05	**Phantasy Star Universe** Sega / PS2

Heather Campbell

01	**Final Fantasy XII** Square Enix / PS2
02	**Final Fantasy VIII** SquareSoft / PS
03	**Final Fantasy VI** SquareSoft / SNES
04	**Final Fantasy VII** SquareSoft / PS
05	**Final Fantasy XI** Square Enix / PS2

Nick DesBarres

01	**Fresh-Picked Tinkles...** Nintendo / NDS
02	**Eiyu Densetsu: Sora no Kiseki** FC Falcom / PSP
03	**Dead Rising** Capcom / Xbox 360
04	**Final Fantasy XI: TAU** Square Enix / Xbox 360
05	**Surging Aura** Sega / Mega Drive

Eric Patterson

01	**Rhythm Tengoku** Nintendo / GBA
02	**Tomb Raider Legend** Eidos / Xbox 360
03	**Summon Night: SS2** Atlus / GBA
04	**Tokobot Plus** Tecmo / PS2
05	**Skipping Stone** Gamevil / Mobile

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MATURE 17+

M

Blood and Gore
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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Thou shall not mud pants while getting big air.

Thou shall customize vehicle to make faster.

Thou shall race in all terrain: snow, dirt, sand,
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Thou shall not wash ATV unless thou washes it with mud.

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Thou shall feed on adrenaline for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

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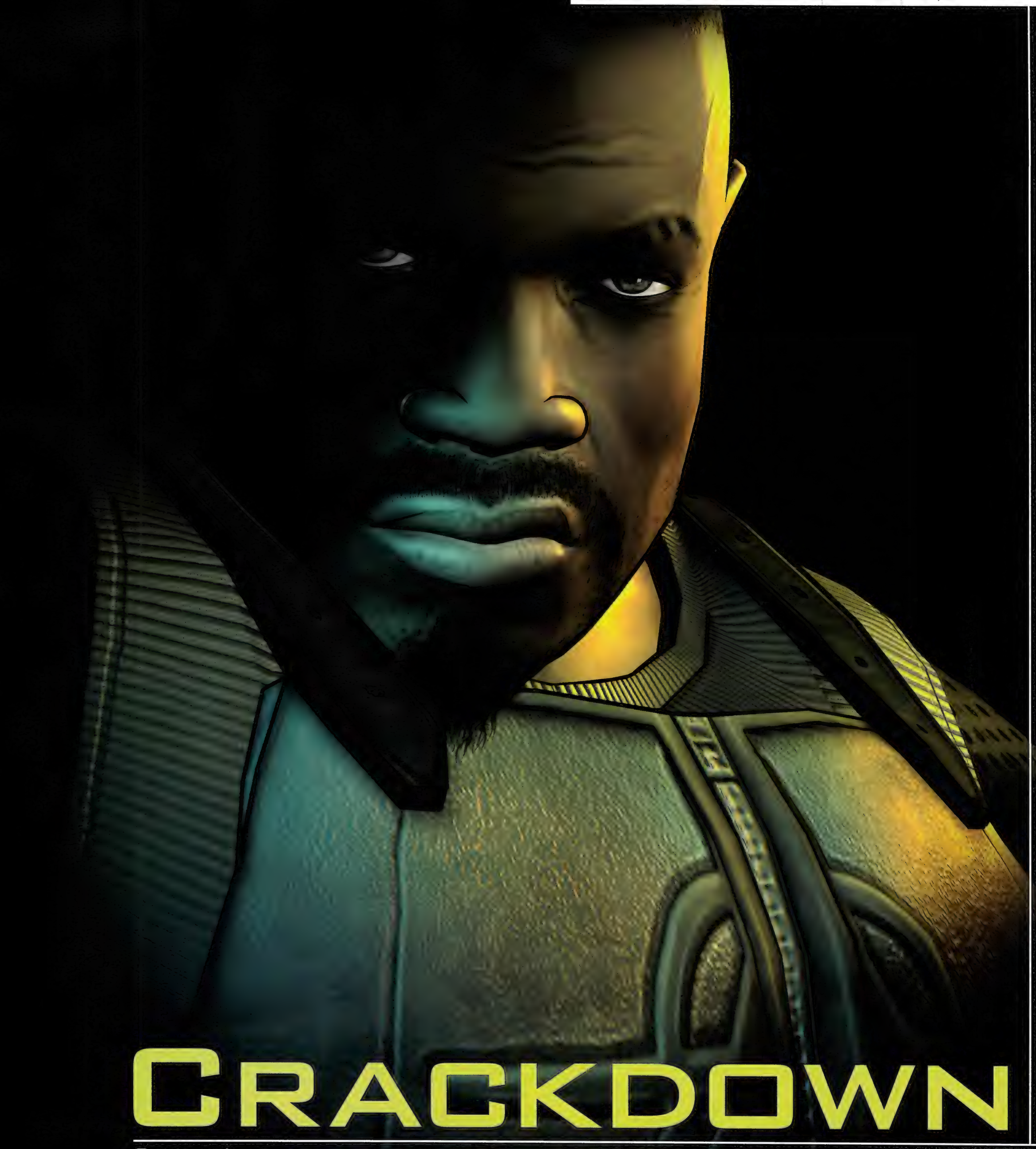
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Cartoon Violence

Comic Mischief

XBOX 360

System(s)	Xbox 360	Publisher	Microsoft
Developer	Real Time Worlds	Available	February



CRACKDOWN

GOING UP!

WORDS DAVE HALVERSON

Looks like Mel's on the sauce again.

The world's gone to hell in a hand-basket and stands at the threshold of global anarchy. In order to combat the rampant criminal activity, the world's crime fighting organizations have rallied together to form one united force to combat the threat, known as The Agency. This is their last stand.

The last bastion of order lies in a stronghold called the Keep, located on an island in the center of the world capital, Pacific City, surrounded by three occupied regions divided between three lethal gangs: Los Muertos, The Volk, and Shai Gen. If the Keep falls the world is lost. But normal peacekeepers don't stand a chance keeping the gangs at bay, so The Agency has no choice but to resort to desperate measures, engaging the services of a disgraced scientist and his perverse research to develop superhuman soldiers: human prototypes that become stronger as they search and destroy that can be easily cloned if eliminated. Welcome to the party, pal.

Dropped into the meat grinder—you get a car, a gun, and a boot into the war zone—with all the subtlety of an ice-skating elephant, Crackdown wastes no time reminding the player that shit's bad and you're in it. Not only is the first stronghold teeming with militia, but the street traffic can be just as deadly as traveling on foot. The Los Muertos are everywhere…including the rooftops. It's one thing getting peppered from street level but when you've got gunners on theatre marquees, rooftops, and balconies raining down grenades it's best to just keep motoring. And that's initially the beauty of Crackdown. There are no colored circles to stand in, no set structure to adhere to. The entire island chain—all three massive regions—are open from the onset as are the 21 crime lords; if you can get to them. The hitch is that your abilities are far from sufficient to handle the streets, let alone infiltrate a compound and kill a kingpin. So, Pacific City becomes a place for you to cut your teeth, developing your agility, strength, firearms, driving and explosives expertise—and RTW have hand-packed the place with gameplay. There are nodes located throughout each city that link you to The Agency's intelligence and weapons cache (once you liberate them) but otherwise you're on your own. Peacekeeper divisions are working throughout the city but it's up to you to take out each gang's hierarchy one linchpin at a time.

It's a refreshing amalgam, heaps more action oriented than any previous open-world game, offering up the big city allure of GTA, the nuanced shooting of an over-the-shoulder action/shooter, and

"Dropped into the meat grinder—you get a car, a gun, and a boot into the war zone."

the jump, shimmy and hanging elements of a platformer. It's hard to fathom how all of this can exist in a game of this magnitude without sacrificing elsewhere, but depending on how you look at it, RTW pull it off. Not only is the entire world open but the look is refreshingly original (makes me pine for a Jet Set sequel all the more). Pedestrian models look great given their numbers, reflective surfaces abound, the textures are rich, character movement is extremely fluid and water not only reflects the sky but you can swim anytime, anywhere. Your agent feels like an action/adventure lead plugged into the normally rigid open-world format. On the flip side, there are no two-wheeled vehicles, no satirical radio stations, and things aren't as cinematic as in GTA or Saint's Row so perhaps that is the trade off.

One thing is for sure; the world outside of the Keep has gone mad, and for some reason everyone in the city has decided to go on a walk. Although Crackdown isn't your token "urban" sprawl, opting instead for a pseudo-futuristic universe with urban undertones, violence levels careen well over the top. Blood squirts and gushes from your victims, whom you can kick or shoot while they're down and then once they're a corpse pick up to hurl off of roofs, into traffic…whatever. And that's only the beginning. As you become stronger you'll be tossing massive gates and soon cars with ease. The shooting in Crackdown also boasts a few firsts for the genre: Confronted with multiple (often charging) assailants, you can free target or lock on and go for the leg, arm, chest or head. You can always go in for the good-ol'-up-close-and-personal quick kill too if you're holding a shotgun, but while fun and easy (especially with regenerating body armor) be warned: these gangs have massive grenade and rocket stockpiles and will not hesitate to bounce you around like a tennis ball. The AI in Crackdown is set on annihilate. Cars and other vehicles can be targeted in the same way. Once locked on you can toggle between the gas tank, driver, etc., depending on the situation.

Crackdown's most compelling feature however, comes by way of the vertical platforming elements. Fans who enjoy the nomadic and explorative aspects of open-world gaming will find out fast what puts the crack in Crackdown. Stairs, fire escapes, awnings and so forth beg to be climbed to pinch the gleaming green agility orbs they conceal, which ultimately make doing so all the richer. Like a mammoth jungle gym, the skyline becomes more and more accessible as your leaping abilities mount, creating an evolving platformer within an open-world framework with epic results. You'll go from using your SUV as a makeshift platform to grapple a 20-foot ledge to flying hundreds of feet through the air with ease. Sounds like The Incredible Hulk? Er, no. Crackdown is far more limber—more like a Tomb Raider on steroids. No matter what you're doing; shooting, driving, or platforming, it all goes to your character's evolution. All that exploration and extracurricular activity pays dividends in Crackdown, slowly revealing the inner hulking-yet-limber killing machine that dwells within.

It seems a wise move on Microsoft's part to delay Crackdown until after the holidays. Anything worth doing (especially of this magnitude) is worth doing right; plus, they avoid the risk of being swept away in the holiday glut, not to mention providing us with more fodder to ring in a very happy new year with our Xbox 360s. With Gears of War, Blue Dragon, Mass Effect, Too Human and Crackdown all slated for the next few months, how could it be anything but?

"Your agent feels like an action/adventure lead plugged into the normally rigid open-world format."

David Jones

David Jones may not be a name you know even though the first studio he founded, DMA Design Ltd. (now Rockstar North) brought us the world's most controversial and best-selling video game series with Grand Theft Auto III. Having written and designed over 15 games including Lemmings, Lemmings 2&3, Body Harvest and Wild Metal Country, David has recently turned his attention to his new studio Real Time Worlds and finishing what DMA started, pioneering once again by going where no open-world game has gone before…up.

INTERVIEW

Personal foul
Roughing the pusher.

play: Your former co. DMA is greatly responsible for this whole movement having ushered in an entirely new genre with GTA III. Why do you think it has taken this long to plug vertical play/ platforming mechanics into the mix? Is it a hardware thing or just that these games are so daunting to create in the first place?
David: Certainly, to a large degree, "Crackdown" benefits from the incredible horsepower of the Xbox 360. We've been able to create an immense, stylized world for the gamer to play in without having to make a lot of the compromises that early open-world games were forced to make. That said, we had yet to see a sandbox title with a three-dimensional world actually think in three dimensions. The universe doesn't just operate on ground level, you know? Kingpins live in the penthouses, as well. And we found that there are limitless possibilities for mayhem and destruction once you introduce a fully vertical world – whether it's raining down destruction from on-high or racing across-town from rooftop-to-rooftop.

Speaking of "they" which moniker do you prefer, "open-world" or "sandbox"? Sandbox sounds like toddlers might have a go don't you think?
In the end, they're really all words for the same thing. "Open-world" is a great term because that's just what we've created – an open world where gamers are free to run and jump and shoot and destroy as they please. And maybe "sandbox" sounds somewhat childish, but it also implies a sense of freedom for the gamer to experience that childish sensation of wonder combined with a tongue-in-cheek adult sense of mayhem.

I know that the key innovation here is the platforming but before we get to that I'm curious about the state of Pacific City and for that matter the rest of the world as Crackdown gets underway. Unlike GTA or more recently Saints Row, the player's introduction to the world is a brutal one. There's no tooling around, sight seeing. At least in the pre-Beta, the immediate vicinity is in utter chaos. Is this meant to convey the message of true anarchy rather than some controlled game environment?
Quite simply, the city is overridden. Gangs have seized control of Pacific City and the police have proven incapable of holding them back. The Agency – and consequently you – are the city's last hope. And if we can all simply admit that we're here to have fun, - to fire a few cool weapons, blow some things up and jump around from building-to-building - then there's no reason that the player shouldn't be thrown into the mix from minute-one.

Once the player crosses the threshold into a boss compound a dossier appears along with the probability for success. Does the player character evolve in league with a certain order of boss kills or is the structure somewhat like an RPG where it's essential that the player level-up? In other words, is there the option to mow through the story or will you simply find yourself outgunned unless you truly bask in the game?
Your Agent will level-up in each of the game's five abilities - strength, agility, firearms, explosives and driving – as he utilizes each one. So the more gunplay or heavy lifting you exercise throughout the game, the more of a muscle-bound marksman your character will become. Gamers should have every opportunity to master each of these skills and become a true level-five agent anywhere in the game-world and at any time. You're not going to be tossing around cars from the very beginning. However, a truly exceptional player might be able to make it through the entire game, defeating each of the 21 kingpins, at a very low level. Killing bosses is not a requisite to leveling up. Some bosses are, of course, more protected and certainly more difficult than others, but with

> " ...we had yet to see a sandbox title with a three-dimensional world actually think in three dimensions."
>
> DAVID JONES

the world being as open and destructible as it is, an intelligent, low-level player can always think of ways to use the world to their advantage.

As the game forges on will the player experience the interior of The Keep (maybe meet the good professor) or are we limited to the garage area?
The heart of the Agency building – or the garage area – is really your main base of operations. And while you might not be able to walk the halls of the Agency, a very agile Agent might be able to climb to – and indeed, jump off of – the very top of the building. Roughly the height of the Empire State Building. (And I'll give you a hint: there's an Achievement to be had there!)

Is skill evolution achieved strictly by completing achievements and collecting orbs or is the players every move dumped into the equation?
Kill an enemy with a machine gun – get a firearms point. Take out a group of enemies with a grenade – get a few explosives points. The more you jump, the higher and farther your next jump will be. Improvement through use. The game does, however, stat-track many of the player's movements and activities, allowing for exciting opportunities to top yourself and your friends and possibly gain a few cool Achievements.

Aside from the presentation of the dossiers, are there also in-game or CG cut scenes? And if so do they push the envelope in any way?
As much as possible, we want the action to progress directly in-game, keeping cut-scenes to a minimum. The dossiers are great fun in that they introduce you to several truly ruthless characters, but the greater fun is in tracking them down and killing them off. The heart-and-soul of any open-world game is how fun it is to play. Gamers simply want to get out there into the world and wreak some havoc, not trudge through cut-scene after cut-scene only to be tasked with delivering some random item across town. In "Crackdown," you're tasked with saving the city, pure and simple, and killing each of the 21 kingpins that hold it hostage. How you do that, and in what order, is entirely up to you.

Of the Seven bosses I discovered, there were no females. Do they get into the act? Does the game have a key female character on either side?
Violence and corruption are certainly not sexist in "Crackdown." Players can expect to bring a few of the city's more villainous vixens to justice, one way or another.

Our preview build featured a nice array of musical selections while driving but none of the cheeky radio stations made famous in GTA III. Is this due to the state of the build or the state of anarchy?
Really, it's about streamlining the experience. "Crackdown" is about Hollywood-style action, not satirical radio programming. So to the extent that we've been able to provide players with a great soundtrack by which to deliver destruction

"The more you jump, the higher and farther your next jump will be. Improvement through use."

DAVID JONES

from rooftop to road, we've done our jobs.

I didn't see any motorcycles... Is the game limited to cars and trucks?
There are no motorcycles this time around. Perhaps in the future...

[Platforming] is certainly worth the effort. Would you agree that this is the single most evolutionary area of the game?
It's certainly one of them. From the vertical-world, to the very stylized visual presentation, to focusing entirely on the dynamic action and rapid momentum of the experience, I think we've added a number of exceptional, evolutionary aspects to the open-world, sandbox genre.

Real Time Worlds
Welcome to the sandbox.

The game has a fascinating look combining detailed textures with cell shading and a touch of normal mapping. Is this meant to lend an air of comic book sensibility lessening the depiction of realistic violence?
The unique visual presentation is meant to reflect the overall style and spirit of the game. We've aimed for a specific level of over-the-top, Hollywood-style action – with bodies flying through the air and massive explosions sending cars flipping into the sky. You are, after all, a genetically-engineered super-agent capable of jumping great heights and lifting a car above your head. A completely realistic visual style wouldn't have complemented this fun, free-form spirit. Additionally, we wanted to create a game that stood-out from similar titles, not just in terms of content and gameplay, but in its appearance as well. We think this very vibrant, colorful, semi-graphic-novel approach is a completely new art-style and the perfect way to present the madness of "Crackdown."

Does the AI detect and adjust to more than a single agent giving co-op players a leg up? And how would you manage to stay together? Can more than one agent occupy a vehicle or do you need to take separate cars?
Players in co-op mode over Xbox Live will be able to go their separate ways and tackle the gangs of Pacific City together or individually. You're not contained to the same area or region. The entire city is open to both players simultaneously and the possibilities for team destruction in such an interactive world are massive and limitless.

Last but certainly not least regarding the shooting, you've not only included a lock-on (thank you) but left us the option to go for the head shot or cripple the enemy. The ability to target different points of a target is another novel concept. Was all of this in the design doc from day one together with all of the other innovations? There's not much here that hasn't seen significant overhaul. Surely the aim is to use all of these advancements in a string of games now that the engine is built. Is a Crackdown series a foregone conclusion?
Wouldn't we love for that to be the case! Ultimately, that will be decided by how gamers respond to this go-round in Pacific City. Certainly, we can only focus on making the absolute best version of what is directly in front of us and with "Crackdown," we're confident that we've created the most intense, innovative, fun-to-play, action-packed, open-world game available. "More of the same" was never our motto! play

"Crackdown" is about Hollywood-style action, not satirical radio programming."

DAVID JONES

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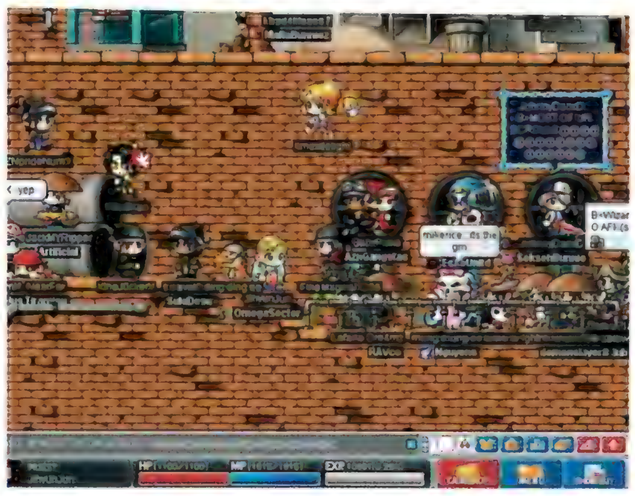

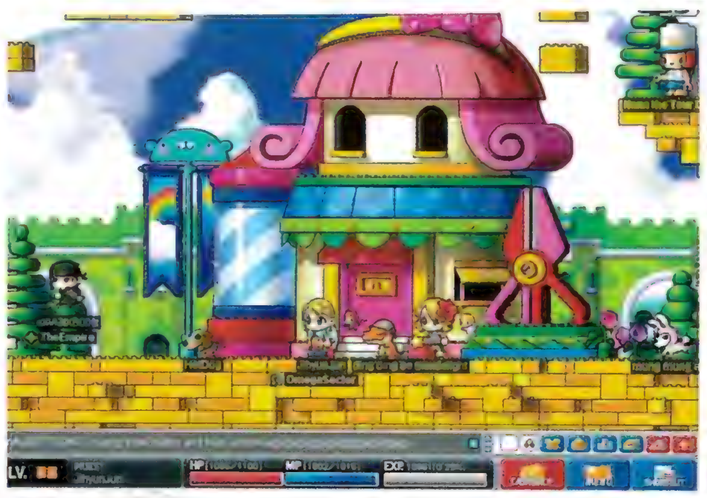

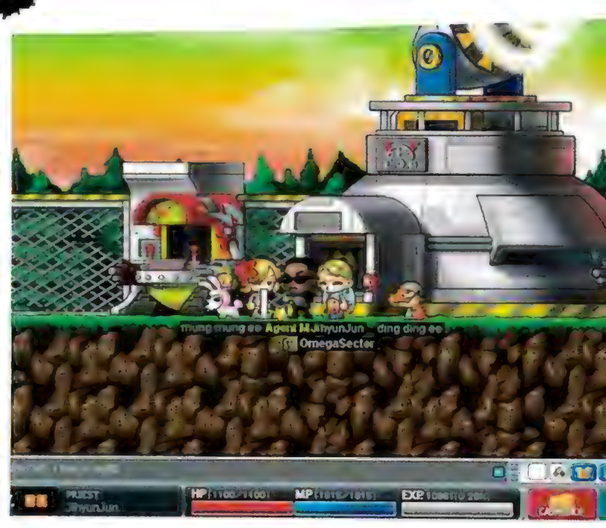

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System(s)	Nintendo DS	Publisher	Konami
Developer	Kojima Productions	Available	February

Lunar Knights

The forecast: darkness with patches of sunshine and heavy pain

words Dave Halverson

I fell madly in love with Lunar Knights at E3—who knew it would be our last in its current form—based on 5 minutes of play in the Nintendo human ant farm. As much as I respect the Metal Gear saga, I miss old school Kojima in a big way, especially having skipped the Boktai series. I wanted to embrace it, but there was just no way I could or would enjoy a game under the glare and heat of the sun. Enter the DS… more power, stylus play and a top screen; how convenient. It wasn't long before digital weather blew in from the East.

Lunar Knights represents two leaps in top-down gaming; digital weather conditions linked directly to the gameplay, and the best thing to happen to 3D shooting since the FPS. But more on that later. More importantly it's a Kojima Productions, hand-drawn, action-RPG brimming with everything you would expect from one of the world's leading and most visionary studios. To have a game like this, with so much thought and care poured into it by such a skilled developer is truly a gift. It's the next best thing since Landstalker—100% original and blessed by the man himself along with the team he has hand selected to propel his namesake into the future.

Lunar Knights drips with polish and prowess from the moment you tap start. Play begins as our anti-hero Lucian overhears a couple of Acuna locals (Acuna being the central city) discussing the state of life in the big city living under the Dark Tribes paraSOL skies. Now that Lucian is back on the prowl, no one is safe in the city of night, where the sun never shines and vampires rule. But the alternative is a life of servitude in the vampires' cursed city…not the greatest options. Lucian's sole purpose in life is to hunt down and kill every last vampire in existence by himself, most of all their lord; The Duke himself. Why is better left to the player. Aiding Lucian on his quest and his sole ally at the outset is a Terrenial named Nero. Terrenials are peaceful elemental beings, most of which have been ceased by the vampires and forced into slavery. As each boss falls, a new Terrenial becomes free and reverts back, joining either Lucian or Aaron to aid on their quest. Aaron doesn't come in for a full chapter, after which his story runs parallel to Lucian's. The tie that binds them is the Guild, the sole organization dedicated to eradicating the vampires. Having witnessed Lucian's immense strength, Bea, a Guild Gunslinger, asks him to join, to which he insolently refuses. Following this event, where Lucian takes down his first vampire general, the vampires attack the Guild in retaliation, where the son of a fallen legendary vampire hunter is training to avenge his father. Aaron wields a Solar Gun which channels its energy from the light of the sun to purify anti-life forms (vampires), however; he has yet to bond with his weapon enough to fire it. His moment of truth is our introduction to his story which also adds a completely new dimension to the game. Lucian wields the legendary Black Sword in melee combat and draws power from the light of the moon, where Aaron wields dual pistols, so

the action is split between shooting and hack-and-slash. But that's only the tip of a very big iceberg. Both Lucian and Aaron also possess the ability to transform into powerful beasts using the Trance gauge to bond with their selected Terrenial. Once transformed each possesses a special skill-set of chain attacks and draining moves. They can also both draw from the ENE gauge which measures the dark energy coursing through their bodies for special attacks and dashing. Once the gauge runs dry so does Aaron's Solar Guns, so enter one of the game's many nuances. ENE can only be recharged under the sun or moon or at participating solar stations (which are in short supply).

Where there are elements there is, of course, alchemy, handled by Acuna's resident mad scientist, Professor Sheridan. Lucian's Black Sword—created in the antiquity age by the Dark Tribes themselves—seems to be the key to prying the world out of the vampires' grip, and Sheridan's the only man that can restore its inherent abilities, given the appropriate materials. Deeper still, the game also has a Baldur's Gate-like experience points system to bolster Vitality, Spirit, and Skill, and a very special diversion, as if all of this top-down action-role-playing wasn't enough…It's obvious that Kojima and company are out to take full advantage of the DS's features. Their innovative use of the top screen takes care of that, but what about the stylus?

> "The vampires in Lunar Knights are not your garden-variety blood suckers."

The vampires in Lunar Knights are not your garden-variety blood suckers. They've taken over the world by creating a defense mechanism impervious to the one thing that can destroy them—sunlight—called Casket Armor and as an extra precaution launched a parasol into space to block the sun, should they become exposed. The Casket Armor renders the sun's rays powerless, so for Lucian or Aaron to truly vanquish a vampire they must first destroy the Casket Armor but then expose the vulnerable vampire to sunlight…which is where Alice the sunflower girl (and the stylus) come in. Besides Nero, the only other person worthy of Lucian's company is Alice—and for good reason. Not only does she monitor Lucian from space but she does so from a satellite capable of reflecting the sun's rays into a concentrated stream.

Aaron goes in for Lucian. Switching hunters on the fly you've always got the right weapon for the job.

Once a vampire is defeated Lucian and Nero board the Casket Rocket, coffin in tow, to breach the alien sky (cue 3D-shooting KP style) and rendezvous with Alice, who then aligns the solar panels and bakes the vampire. These shooting stages represent what I believe to be coolest use of the stylus thus far; using it to both navigate the ship and shoot by tapping on incoming projectiles. You really have to see and experience it to appreciate it but paired with the game's action-role-playing chops and gorgeous anime (there's like an insane anime in here too) Lunar Knights is everything you could possibly ask for from a DS game.

The art throughout, marrying goth and sci-fi, is superb, the play mechanics and balance truly unique, and the writing dark, witty and never too verbose. As for the music, again, you really must experience it for yourself. It's like nothing else on the DS in terms of overall sophistication.

Handheld gaming represents the proliferation and evolution of gaming's rich hand-drawn heritage and Lunar Knights stands as a pinnacle of both.

Interview

Kensuke Yoshitomi (L), Lunar Knights Producer
Ikuya Nakamura (R), Lunar Knights Director

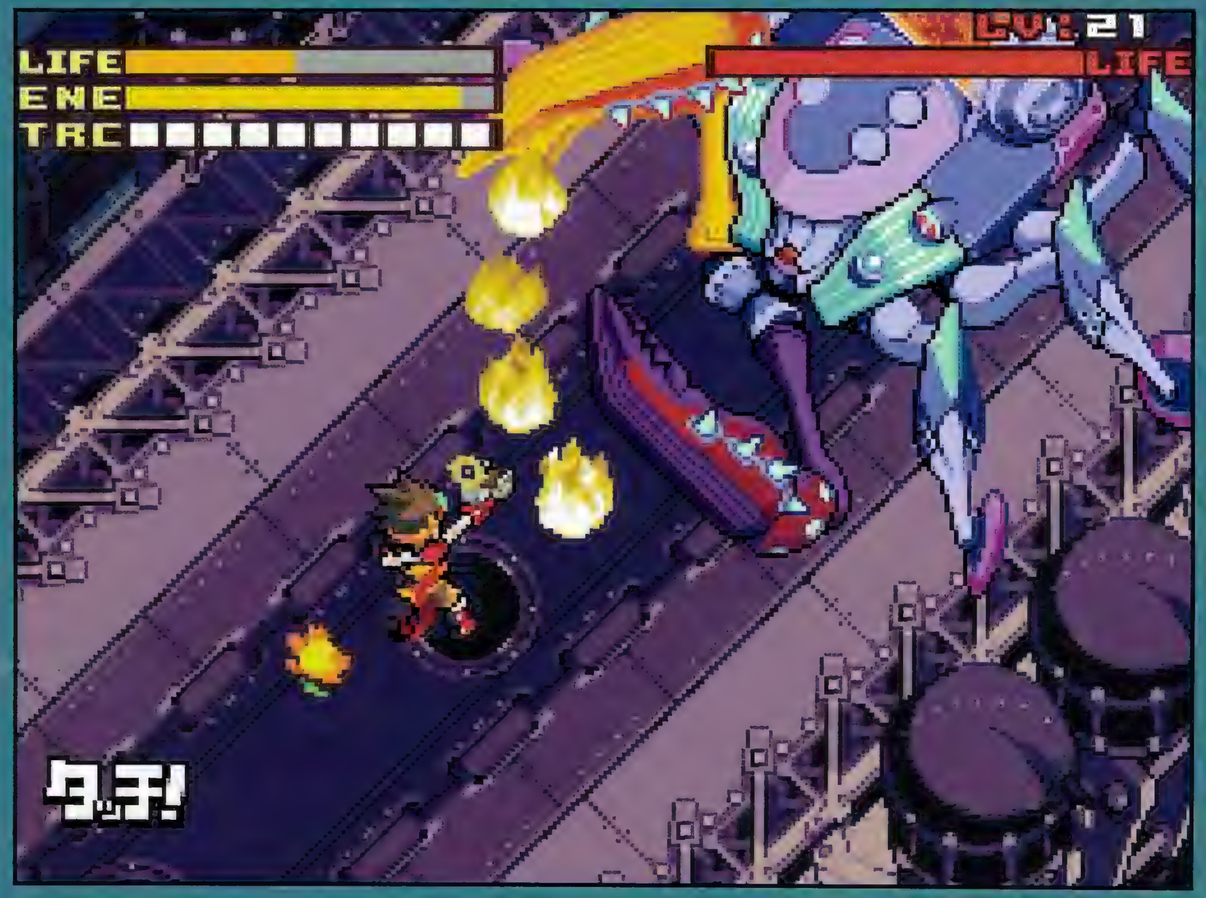
Lunar Knights Producer Kensuke Yoshitomi's credits include assistant director on Policenauts, line producer for Zone of the Enders: the 2nd Runner, and script supervisor on Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. Director Ikuya Nakamura's credits include graphics on Metal Gear Solid, and Metal Gear: Sons of Liberty, and art direction and cg-character design on Metal Gear: Ghost Babel. Both also worked extensively on the Boktai series.

play: Your associate Igarashi-san also likes to extinguish vampires. What is it about them that make them such tempting fodder?
Kensuke Yoshitomi: What's fun about beating up vampires is they are stronger than humans and they don't die in normal ways. One of the attractive things about vampires is that they retain some intellectual bearings even though they are monsters. One of the larger missions in Lunar Knights is to conquer these strong but clever opponents.
Ikuya Nakamura: In Boktai, we had players use the Solar Sensor to purify vampires using actual sunlight. But in Lunar Knights, we have taken that concept further by extending the stage to outer space. Players now pilot the Casket Rocket and transport fallen vampires to the solar power at the Purifex for purification.

I like the stealth touches reminiscent of the 8-bit Metal Gear (love the whistling!). Were these designed with that game in mind—a mark of its Kojima heritage?
KY: Whistling is one of the elements we are very proud of! In games, even if you create a solid and deep battle system, having the same actions will just lead to monotonous game play. This is why we're implementing more than just stealth elements in order to give the game a variety of gameplay, setting it apart from other games. Among those features we've included 3D shooting stages and burst attacks that use the DS stylus and microphone, as well as plenty of RPG and

"The world of LK is gothic horror mixed with a lot of other elements such as sci-fi and fantasy."

~ Kensuke Yoshitomi, Producer



industry's best! We're also very proud of the 3D elements in the game.

The Casket Rocket shooting levels are sublime and I can't believe how fun and effective the stylus is controlling them. How difficult was this to achieve? You guys need to make an Axelay DS!
KY: Wow, AXELAY? Such a sweet, old classic!
The good thing about the stylus is it's easy to pick up and play, and gamers know exactly what's happening on the screen. The player can also feel more interactively with the game itself.
So when we started creating the Casket Rocket shooting stages, we started with a policy of making use of the Nintendo DS features effectively. This policy and early brainstorming resulted in a shooting stage that can only be controlled with the stylus. One of the hardest parts about the design was balance. One challenge we had to overcome was how to allow players to attack and move their ship without it being frustrating. It was also challenging to adjust the angle so players can see what enemies lie in front of their ships. We hope that many gamers enjoy the new shooting stages in Lunar Knights!

How close is the Lunar Knights universe to the Boktai games? Or is this a new beginning? Do you look at this as the 3rd in the series or the first in a new series?
KY: Lunar Knights is our new IP, but its timeline does have some relation to Boktai. Anyone who played previous Boktai games may smile when they see familiar things. But since Lunar Knights is a fresh beginning, players can jump into it without worrying whether or not they know the back-story and play mechanics. You can think of it as a parallel world to that of Boktai.

Although I understood the novelty of it, Boktai was inconvenient. The DS seems like the perfect device to hone your day/night charging system. Did you realize this right away?

KY: The Sun Sensor in Boktai was quite inconvenient, but it was something we wanted players to experience along with the other parts of the game. But it truly was unfair to players in Norway, for example, where there isn't a lot of sunlight.
IN: Kojima Productions put a lot of thought into this dilemma which is why the Nintendo DS seemed like such a perfect fit for Lunar Knights. When Mr. Kojima heard the news about the dual screen for the DS, he said, "Have the sun and moon on the top screen!"

What's the word on a Lunar Knights II?
KN: Whether or not we create Lunar Knights II all depends on the reaction from gamers. If we hear cries for a sequel, then we'll make it!
But in the meantime, we're not holding anything back for a sequel while we develop Lunar Knights. We're throwing everything we've got into making this a must-have title on Nintendo DS.

I love the game but would love it even more if it had jumping...Is it too difficult to add that tier of gameplay with this viewpoint?
KN: We just figured you could jump in games like DDR... but in all seriousness, we believe that jumping action wouldn't be appropriate given the isometric angle of Lunar Knights. But we do understand that jumping would freshen up the gameplay even more.
If we do continue the series, implementing a jump feature is something we definitely will consider.

I really like the Bea character. If the story continues might we see a female Gunslinger?
KY: We are glad to hear you liked Bea! She does play a big role over the story, but unfortunately, you cannot play as her this time. But we'll remember your comments as we move forward with our next project. We totally agree that female vampire hunters are cool! **play**

9 beautiful girls.

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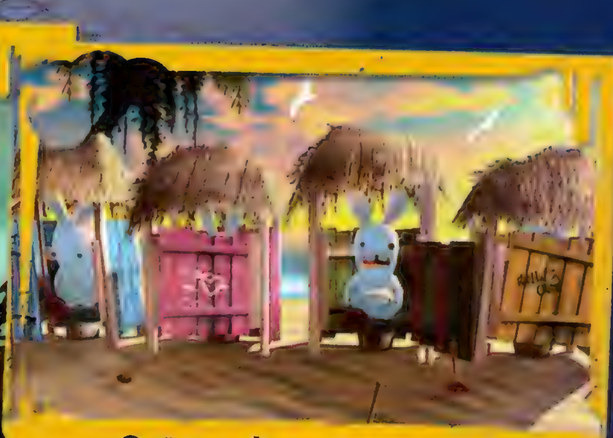

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UBISOFT

Naruto Uzumaki Chronicles

Cavia does anime right...again

System(s)	PlayStation 2	Publisher	Namco Bandai Games
Developer	Cavia Inc.	Available	November 14

words **Dave Halverson**

Bandai certainly drew the long straw when Naruto franchises were being handed out; not that Clash and especially Ninja Council 1&2 aren't good games. It's just that following the wonderfully Smash Bros.-like 'Ultimate Ninja', Uzumaki Chronicles gives them the proverbial leg up, as UC succeeds in the same vein; breaking from the rest of the traditional anime-based fighting pack. And what a crowded pack it has become.

While UC isn't an all-out free-roaming adventure, it is a mission-based fighting RPG through and through, and a well put together one at that. The game rides on an overhead map in and around Hidden Leaf Village dotted with locations key to the flow of information and story. Roaming from place to place, players are interrupted by battles just as they would be in a traditional RPG, only these are spectacular open-area free roaming battles—among the best ever seen on PS2. Not only is the action fine tuned to the "T"—gotta love the slope collision and detail such as knee-high flora—but the systems at work are just as impressive, including a tap-on tap-off lock-on and a simple yet perfectly apropos control scheme toggling between Jutsus, combos, and switching characters...which leads us to the game's wonderful party

> "While UC isn't an all-out free-roaming adventure, it is a mission-based fighting RPG through and through."

system. Along the way, as you knock out mission after mission—some silly, some not so—different characters key to the story will come along for the ride, making them available for future missions to toggle in and out of situations given the task ahead. The game also features an RPG-like leveling-up system where you cannot only raise attributes Baldur's Gate-style, but sell earned Virtue won in battle to increase health or stamina, or buy Skill Chips to be placed on the Skill Plates, which can also be upgraded, essentially giving you complete control over your character's attributes. The game could do with a save on the fly feature and the ability to skip previously viewed in-game movies, but otherwise it's another classy game for Naruto fans. **play**

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Q? ENTERTAINMENT

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> "Moving through Naon is oftentimes haunting, like looking at ruins submerged beneath a shallow pool."

experience ancient tragedies first-hand.

10Tacle wants Elveon to invoke myths, and leave the player feeling like they've experienced a legend. So far, they're on the right track. Not only does the game have the weight of this unique history behind it, but the Unreal Engine setting has been given a water-colored makeover. Moving through Naon is oftentimes haunting, like looking at ruins submerged beneath a shallow pool. When the rain-soaked environments aren't cast in muted greys, they shimmer with sun-kissed realism.

The forest I was shown was breathtaking. Light passed in-between treetops and picked up an opaque dustiness. The leaves swayed gently in the breeze. I was simultaneously disappointed and exhilarated that this enchanted place would soon be teaming with monsters. One can only hope that the beasts' design does justice to the awesome beauty of their surroundings.

Now, Elveon isn't just a game about backdrops and history. Much of the demo we were shown at play focused on the intense combat system being used in the game. This is not going to be a button-mashing, action charge; fighting in the Elvish world is measured and deliberate. After a basic training session with an elven mentor, we were hurried out into the world to fight our first two enemies … and promptly got our asses handed to us. Getting used to the pace of battle, and the calculated moments of striking and defense made the game feel genuine. This isn't God of War, with a combat system that looked like ballet but played like a jam; this is more like learning to actually dance. And succeeding in an Elveon battle is that much more rewarding as a result. When the hero wins against an enemy, it's because you outsmarted the A.I., not because you're naturally more powerful.

This is one of the key ideas behind the game, it seems—honor through tactics. Multiple weapons classes mean that each battle can be unique, and each environment produces its own challenges. Fighting in a narrow hallway with a long staff is impossible, so pull out that short-

sword, and lure your spear-bearing enemy down into the trenches.

Character development in Elveon was promised to be unique to each player. If you're someone who loves the snap of the bow, you can upgrade your avatar to be proficient with arrows alone. A sweet feature of the game is the idea of the Dragon Room, where stat upgrades are made. The hero dreams of four pathways, each with a god or divine creature representing a weapon skill, and chooses the direction of his development from here. Being a gamer who loves immersion, it is with happy relief that I see combat upgrades arriving from an in-story metaphor. There's nothing I hate more than dropping out of a lush background to stare at some menu for a few minutes. Elveon pledges to do away with this, both with the Dragon Room, and in-game weapon switching.

Elveon isn't going to be released until late 2007, and much of the game is bound to change before then. 10Tacle has even suggested that the PC game will be different from the 360 edition, and that perhaps the console Elveon will be more action-oriented, and the desktop version rely more on RPG elements. As of right now, the game doesn't use the weather engine, which will pull at garments and hair with water and wind, nor does the game run off of more than one core. The international Slovakian team pledges to continue striving for something really unique and satisfying; a game with powerful, heavy heroes burdened by the weight of a thousand years of history, stepping through a natural world both graceful and oppressive. **play**

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System(s)	Xbox 360	Publisher	Tecmo
Developer	Tecmo	Available	November 2006

Dead or Alive Xtreme 2

Paradise Lost . . . and found once more

words **Greg Orlando**

Tomonobu Itagaki, the man behind Tecmo's Dead or Alive titles, is eating a giant hamburger with chopsticks. He's sitting outside on a glorious Hawaiian afternoon, right next to the giant pool with its accompanying hot tub, faux rock slide that's been dubbed—for its coarse exterior and punishing final bump —"the bleeder," and waterfall.

It is perhaps 80F, and there is a slight wind. Palm trees rustle softly in the background and the air, perhaps filtered by thousands of miles of the Pacific Ocean, is pure and fresh. Right now, there is no finer place on Earth than this mansion Tecmo has rented, and no more perfect venue to show off the idyllic beach adventure Dead or Alive Xtreme 2.

Later, Itagaki will adjourn, with his translator, to a dimly lit and air conditioned meeting room or to the mansion's spacious dining hall to talk about his new game, an Xbox 360 exclusive, and the sequel to 2003's Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball. He will answer countless questions from the assembled game writers about tan lines and minigames, online play and ninja.

"For me, in my philosophy of design," Itagaki says, " I usually start off with a product that, in its first iteration, is rough around the edges and just kind of a basic expression of a concept." The second game in the series, he notes, is where this rough-hewn idea becomes polished and refined.

"I've never had a game—a second game in a series—that was unsuccessful," he says. "I've had games that were first in a series that were unsuccessful."

Inside the mansion, people are sitting down to play an early version of Xtreme that Itagaki's brought straight from Tecmo's Team Ninja headquarters in Japan. As it stands, the game is missing its story mode, the one where the females from the Dead or Alive fighting game series travel to a deserted and suitably gorgeous tropical island to compete against one another in a series of challenges, and then pose provocatively in swimsuits. Right now, fun under Dead or Alive Xtreme 2's high-definition sun consists of six minigames: beach volleyball, pool hopping, jetski racing, tug-of-war, butt bump, and flag racing.

"I usually start off with a product that, in its first iteration, is rough around the edges and just kind of a basic expression of a concept."

Volleyball and pool hopping are holdovers from Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball, but both have been altered for Xtreme 2. This time around, the pace for Xtreme's two-on-two volleyball will be a lot quicker, Itagaki asserts, and

These ladies know how to tip-toe.

Any one up for a game of volley ball?

the play style more aggressive. A new feature allows players to set up quick spikes, something the game's new character Kokoro, will be exceedingly good at. Further, emphasis is being taken away from feint attacks, strategic soft hits that oftentimes won points in the original game, and refocused on blocking and smashmouth spiking both at the net and from mid-court. For the hopping minigame, players are required to guide their female protagonist across the length of a pool, jumping on colored platforms to avoid a dunking. Itagaki has turned this contest of skill into a race; an artificial intelligence-controlled Dead or Alive warrior has been added for players to compete against.

The marine race portion seems to be the most intriguing of the new minigames, with players cutting across a series of exaggeratedly blue and sparkling seas on jetskis. Here, it's necessary to beat four other females by carefully navigating around a series of buoys, through water-based obstacles such as piers, and over huge ramps. Speed boosts are awarded for players who successfully make their way through the buoys, and the "X" button on the Xbox 360's controller performs a series of stunts where a female racer will stand on her jetski, do flips over its handlebars, or steer while directly facing the game's camera. Various spins, and other maneuvers such as barrel rolls will be possible after making a jump off a ramp and then pressing the Xbox 360's left analog stick in certain directions. Marine race, along with volleyball, will be playable online; racing supports four players via Xbox 360 Live and volleyball allows for one-on-one action.

Dead or Alive warriors can also pit their fearsome, well-toned asses against one another in a butt bumping contest. This battle of the bulge puts two girls on one floating platform, requiring them to slam each other—the mode allows for both strong and weak bump attacks via the Xbox controller's left analog stick, as well as for dodges and sidesteps—with the goal being to send the opponent into the drink. Here, Itagaki notes slyly, a competitor such as the wrestler Tina, who is more powerfully built, will be better suited to butt bumping than, say, the petite schoolgirl Hitomi.

Flag racing hearkens back to the Konami arcade classic Track & Field, with the women starting off each race on their stomachs. Rapid-fire button tapping speeds a woman to the finish line, where she must dive for a flag in order to win. In tug-of-war, two females are placed on floating platforms, with each holding one end of a short rope. Both yanks and feints are possible, and females teetering on a platform's edge can recover their balance if their handler quickly presses the Xbox controller's "A" button. The loser is, of course, the one who falls. A seventh minigame, by the by, one featuring a giant water slide, has been planned but not yet implemented.

After a day in the sun, the females can retire to New Zack Island's casino, where a reworked poker mode lets players try their hands, literally, against those of Dead or Alive's contingent of ninja, assassins, and wrestlers. Every one of the cast members included here will play according to her personality, Itagaki says.

"Trying to guess what Kasumi is going to do is pretty futile," he says. "She's always kind of thinking of something else, or following the voice inside of her." The assassin Christie will be more cutthroat at the poker table. "Christie is out for the kill at the poker table as well," he says, "You better watch out." Slot machines have also been revamped, with the characters getting new themed one-armed bandits. Christie's slot machine, in particular, will hold a very interesting surprise, Itagaki says cryptically.

The game is fleshed out with tan lines, a 20-song strong soundtrack ("we spent about as much on the licensing royalties for the songs as it would take to make a whole other game," Itagaki says), and a photo mode where players can put their favorite volleyballer into one of 180 different settings and take snapshots.

Swimsuits are a deadly serious business here, and Xtreme 2's creator specifically set out to address what he felt were deficiencies in terms of the original game's apparel. First and foremost, each suit will have its own personality, he says; Xtreme Beach Volleyball suffered because a lot of its suits were too similar to one another. Also, Volleyball had made it difficult, perhaps unduly so, for players to acquire all the game's bathing suits for each of its characters. Now, he says, he's removed any limitations, and it will be a lot easier to collect swimwear.

"The first game you were kind of jumping to keep from falling into pits. In this new game, you're jumping for joy, jumping for happiness," he says. **play**

Virtua Fighter 5

Sega gets Five . . . for fighting

System(s)	PlayStation 3	Developer	Sega
Publisher	Sega	Available	Spring 2007

Virtua fist, rest assured, will meet virtua face this spring. Virtua Fighter 5, Sega's popular arcade fighting game has an exclusive date with the PlayStation 3.

Sega will present a sweet 17 brawlers here. Old favorites such as Akira Yuki, the drunkard senior citizen Shun Di, Sarah Bryant, and the ninja Kage will make return appearances, and are joined by two new fighters. The first, a young Chinese girl named Eileen, uses a fighting style described as "monkey kung fu" that emphasizes a lot of rolling and tumbling as well as quick, erratic strikes. The other new fighter, El Blaze, is a masked wrestler who fights in the lucha libre style made famous by grapplers Mil Mascaras (literally, "a thousand masks") and current WWE mainstay Rey Mysterio.

Each of the game's characters will initially have four separate outfits to choose from. As players progress through the game's story mode, they'll have the opportunity to customize their hero with tattoos, headgear, jewelry, glasses, and other pieces of clothing, a feature first seen in the game's arcade version.

Sadly, reports out of this year's Tokyo Game Show indicate Sega's likely not going to feature online play here, which is a genuine Virtua Shame. **Greg Orlando**

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

Who could dare to supersede me?

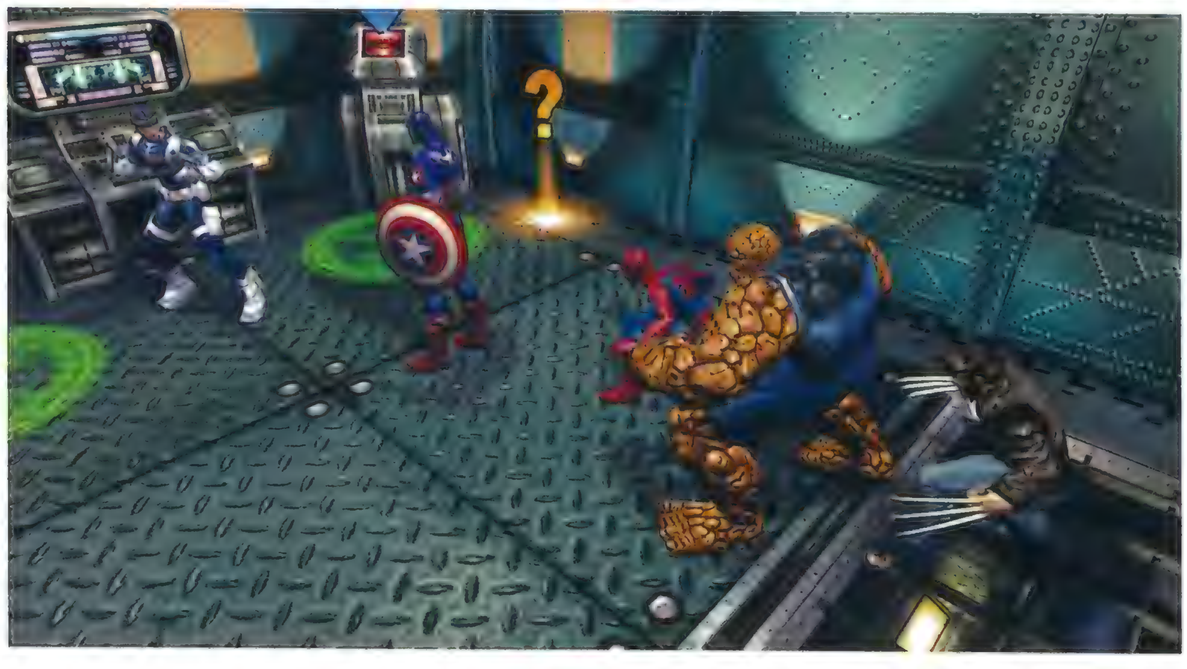
System(s)	PS2, PS3, Xbox, Xbox 360, PC, NDS, Wii	Developer	RavenSoft, Vicarious Visions, Beenox Studios
Publisher	Activision	Available	Now

In the history of recorded time, mankind has seen prime time, Miller Time, Hammer time, and daylight savings time. Now, however, there can be no debate, no room for discussion. This, truly, is clobbering time.

Activision's gathered together 20-plus heroes from the Marvel comic book universe as playable characters for the action role-playing game Marvel: Ultimate Alliance. Here, players can build and customize four-man squads, picking and choosing from powerful superbeings such as Captain America, the Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, Ghost Rider, Wolverine, Iron Man, The Thing, Mr. Fantastic, Human Torch, and Thor. All told, the game promises approximately 140 heroes, villains, and bit players.

A playable demo featured such villains as the Scorpion, the projectile-tossing Bullseye, and Radioactive Man. The giant dragon Fin Fang Foom served as a boss enemy, and the highlight of the brief demo was when the hydrocephalic monstrosity MODOK (Mental Organism Designed Only for Killing) subjected players to a trivia quiz where wrong answers were punished by depleting the heroes' health.

Missions have players battling underwater with the use of nanite technology, on Earth (in such neat locations as the X-Men's mansion), and in the bowels of hell itself. And this fight surely demands a Marvel-style exclamation. Excelsior! **Greg Orlando**



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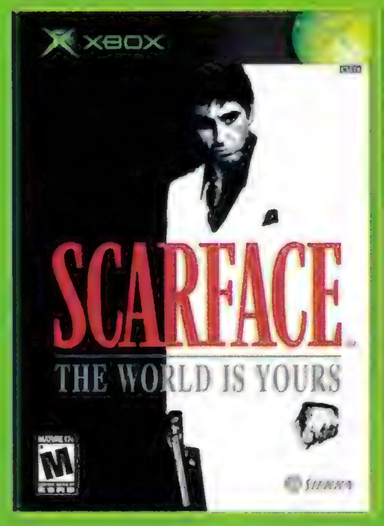

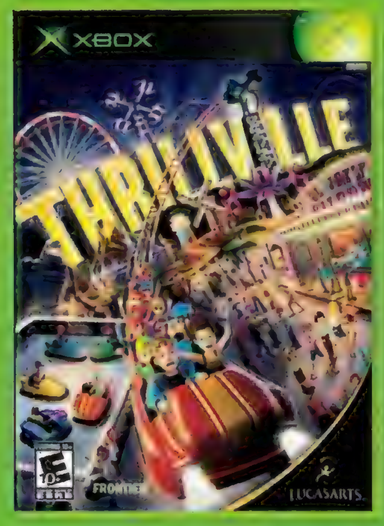

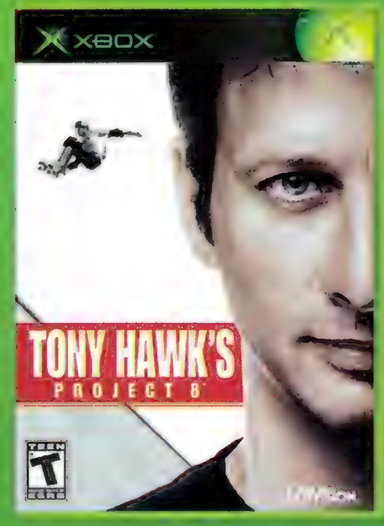

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Eye of Judgement

System(s)	PlayStation 3	Publisher	Sony
Developer	SCEJ	Available	November

It may not be the big-gun title launching for PS3, but Eye of Judgement has the distinction of being the one that offers you something beyond visual innovation. With use of the Eye Toy, you command virtual cards with your movements into the camera's visual field, setting off grid-based battles between an array of creatures from traditional fantasy. ***BF***

Lair

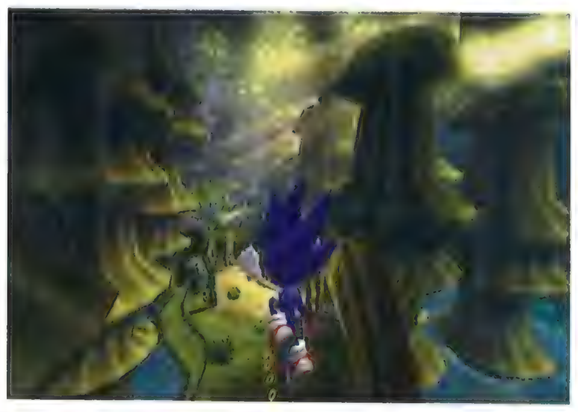
System(s)	PlayStation 3	Publisher	Sony
Developer	Factor 5	Available	November

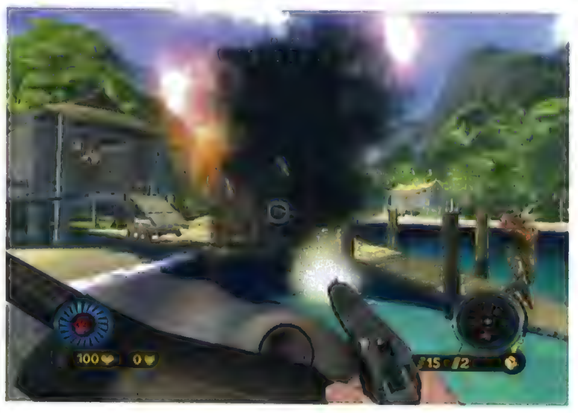
A dragon is your inseparable friend and mighty warrior in Lair, an action-adventure posing the age-old conflict: war is ravishing a civilization, extinction is at hand. Action takes place on your dragon, which battles over air and ground against armies of various creatures numbering in the thousands. ***BF***

Sonic and the Secret Rings

System(s)	Wii	Publisher	Sega
Developer	Sega	Available	Spring 2007

In his first solo adventure since 1991, Sonic is pulled into the world of Arabian Nights, its fairytale setting coming to life after he's been visited by the Genie of the story. The ending of the book is missing, and it's Sonic's mission to figure out the mystery of its contents. The Wii controller is used to mimic a dynamic range of Sonic's movements, including combo sequences and new moves like catapults. ***BF***





Far Cry Vengeance

System(s)	Wii	Publisher	Ubisoft
Developer	Ubisoft	Available	November

Far Cry Vengeance is yet another offshoot of the Far Cry universe, retooled with some new maps, weapons and story details. The game begins with Jack's feral powers already manifested, giving him predatory support in his quest to pull of a major heist and avoid murder charges. Wii controller use will involve driving vehicles, tossing grenades, balancing acts, weapons and various other mechanics. ***BF***

Metal Slug Anthology

System(s)	Wii	Publisher	SNK
Developer	SNK	Available	November

Metal Slug 1, Metal Slug 2, Metal Slug X, Metal Slug 3, Metal Slug 4, Metal Slug 5, and Metal Slug 6, all on one disc. Yes, that's a lot of Metal Slugs. Metal Slug 6 was actually never released in the states, existing as an arcade title only. The games will maintain all the mechanics in their original form; use of the Wii controller beyond the traditional d-pad movement is being implemented, details forthcoming. ***BF***

The doctors will see you now...

It takes years of medical school, residency, and clinic duty to become a surgeon and save lives. Or, you could skip all that and put in a few hours after dinner.

Dr. Derek Stiles is back, but he's not the only surgeon on call- Dr. Nozomi Weaver joins the team, bringing along everything the doctor ordered: difficulty modes, new surgical implements like the defibrillator, and an exciting never-before-seen conclusion!

If one dose of Trauma Center wasn't enough, it's time you got a second opinion!

TRAUMA CENTER™ SECOND OPINION

Wii™

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Mild Language
Mild Violence

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Art: Dany Orizio

Best-of series Part 3

shooters!

compiled by Dave Halverson

Shooting—it's one of the most fundamental aspects of gaming—has been since day one. As each genesis has run its course, developers have found ways to make them new again, pushing us from primitive shooters like Missile Command and Space Invaders, to a fantastic generation of side-scrollers and overhead shooters, action shooters, and finally first-person shooters which belong in a category all their own (which they'll get next issue). Whether you prefer old or new or are new to gaming you'll find a wealth of diverse shooters among these picks.

modus operandi

Tricks of the trade

THE MOTHERSHIP - In the days of 16 pixel x 16 pixel sprites, shooters wowed us with massive ships that were three screens long. We were too dumb to know that they were just static backgrounds with a few turrets stuck on 'em, but that doesn't make 'em any less magical.

20XX - It isn't clear what exact year 20XX represents, but we'll know it has come when the events of 700 late-'80s space shooters occur simultaneously.

SPREAD-SHOT OR LASER - You can have a spread-shot that fires in a wide arc but does little damage, or you can have a laser that does heavy damage, but only right in front. To have both in one ship? IMPOSSIBLE! Even in 20XX.

Floating letters always lead to something good…but wait for them to come to you!

Alert the military! Lasers, massive light beams, and homing missiles are powerful weapons but nothing is as dangerous as multiple streams of colored dots!

In the near-future, we will likely lose our ability to speak proper English and instead enthrall alien invaders by saying stuff like, "Main screen turn on," "What you say?" and "Take off every zig for great justice."

Intelligence is not a prerequisite, especially if you're going to be buried as a smoldering corpse who decided to take cover behind an explosive barrel.

Tentacles are high fashion for today's hyperviolent, on-the-go boss monster.

Today's modern airplanes can avoid destruction by looping. Hopefully, in the near-future, scienticians will be able to develop a plane that can loop more than three times.

The lone gunman - The fate of the Earth / mankind / the universe itself rests on the brink, and as a civilization, we... send out one lone ship and pray to God it can overcome the odds. You'd think we'd put out a slight bit more of an effort.

OPTIONS!! - No self-respecting spacecraft goes into the heat of battle without little orb thingies floating around it. They shoot, they protect us from enemy crafts and all the space junk that's flying around, they're stylish—the ultimate in after-market upgrades.

Consensus Top 10

1. Radiant Silvergun
2. Sin & Punishment
3. Panzer Dragoon Orta
4. Gunstar Heroes
5. Ikaruga
6. Contra Hard Corps
7. Metal Slug 3
8. Gunvalkyrie
9. Ranger X
10. Einhander

play

Greg Orlando
Senior Editor

In the dim, Lik-m-aid and Pixy Stix-fueled haze of my youth, I spent roughly the gross national product of a small, possibly derelict, South American country on trips to the arcade. And it was around that time of carefree innocence and calloused index fingers that I discovered true love: Love of blasting things until I couldn't see straight. Love of blasting things until the quarters ran out, or there was no more stuff to shoot.

Now, as I march single-mindedly to senility and death with the grim determination of a war prisoner, I'll be damned if I can clearly discern between a shooter and an action shooter. But by splitting hairs, I was aiming at the wrong target. What mattered was that I could name 50 shooters at the drop of a hat, and quote chapter and verse on how they'd moved me. And that, plainly put, struck home.

Dave Halverson
Editor In Chief

My first shooter was Gyruss on the Atari 5200. I remember getting it for my birthday and staying up all night in complete disbelief that such a thing was actually in my room. The fact that 23 years later I can recall the moment like it was yesterday is a testament to gaming's golden years. I often wonder if that level of awe even exists today where the average gamer isn't happy unless a game consumes more hours than the average work week, after which it's put on the shelf. I've been playing Sin & Punishment (a two-hour game) for 6 years…now that's a long game.

Narrowing 20 years' worth of shooters down to ten in each category was no easy task. Leaving so many great choices on the cutting room floor was gut wrenching. I have to say though, going back to play these games again made me wish more than ever that the side-scrolling shooter wasn't a relic of the past. Maybe someday gamers will realize that a mind-blowing few hours of intense gameplay is just as worthy as a 40-hour-long epic. If not, we'll always have the past. And what a great trip it's been.

Mike Griffin
PC Editor

From power-ups to boss fights, no other form of gaming has you navigating through flotsam and fireworks with the immediacy of a good traditional shooter. The horizontal and vertical scrolling greats honed our early cognizance of patterns and pacing in twitch skill games. The masterworks tend to defy technology and time. Games like Gunstar Heroes and Radiant Silvergun look, sound and play amazing to this day. One's engagement in a traditional shooter does not rely on aesthetic complexity, however. Witness the minimalism of Tempest/Tempest 2000 and its exquisite synergy of playfield and gameplay. At another point in the spectrum, Metal Slug 3 and Gradius V wouldn't be the same without their opulent presentation. And while Panzer Dragoon Zwei's 3D world begged the Saturn for more, its patterns and pacing are built of sumptuous textures indeed. I salute the craft of these fine shooters.

Brady Fiechter
Executive Editor

The first game I ever played for the first system I ever owned was Zaxxon on ColecoVision. Shooters quickly became my genre of choice in my early gaming years, dominating the arcade play and taking most of my waking hours in the home. There's something about these games that tickles my gameplay nerve in a most unique way—the geometric interaction with the bullet patterns, the instinct of avoidance, the rhythm you fall into pushing through the streams of chaos, reacting more than thinking. Perhaps no other genre holds up to the test of time like a shooter, still entertaining back to the 8-bit days. Visual presentation and control schemes aren't as crucial to their effect, which gives the shooter, to me, some of the purest form of gameplay. It's a shame modern gaming hasn't much room left to host what could still be the elegant simplicity that is the shooter.

Eric L. Patterson
Contributing Editor

My selection of shooters may be a bit odd... I've never been a fan of the hardcore, dodge a thousand bullets type of shooter (with a few exceptions), so I tend to gravitate to the more "unusual" ones. I also, and this may sound weird, love shooters with a lot of powering up or ship enhancement: anything from Terra Cresta's ship combining to Mars Matrix's weapon beefing. Galaga may seem like a strange choice for my #1 traditional shooter, but I've loved this game for what seems like forever. That love has been rekindled thanks to Xbox Live Arcade, where I can compete online with friends instead of just trying for the high score at the local pizza place. I'd love to see more titles from my lists show up on XBL (or other online-friendly services)... Twinkle Star Sprites especially. As for my #1 action shooter, is there really anything better than Pocky & Rocky? No way.

Nick Des Barres
Japanese Correspondent

Shoot. Dodge. Dodge. Shoot. These instincts are primal -- dodge the wooly mammoth; shoot it with your atlatl. They will always remain essential components of action gaming (it's a rare title indeed that does not incorporate some variant of dodging and shooting), though the game template as it existed in the 8- and 16-bit eras is now all but gone. It's a shame, as I can think of no other genre that was so frenetic, visceral, and demanding. A quality shooter requires moment-to-moment monitoring of the situation, and a lapse in concentration for even a second often literally meant death. Assembling this list was difficult: I had a pool of over 50 candidates, and the lack of a Darius or R-Type in the list was an unfortunate consequence of whittling down one of my favorite genres to a list of twenty. We may never see a return to the glory days of the early 90s, when seemingly every Japanese third party was pumping out "shmups" (Lord, what an awful term) with abandon. But with boutique houses like G.rev, Cave and Treasure still committed to the genre, almost like aficionados of black-and-white film or analog synthesiser equipment, it's safe to say shooters will never truly die.

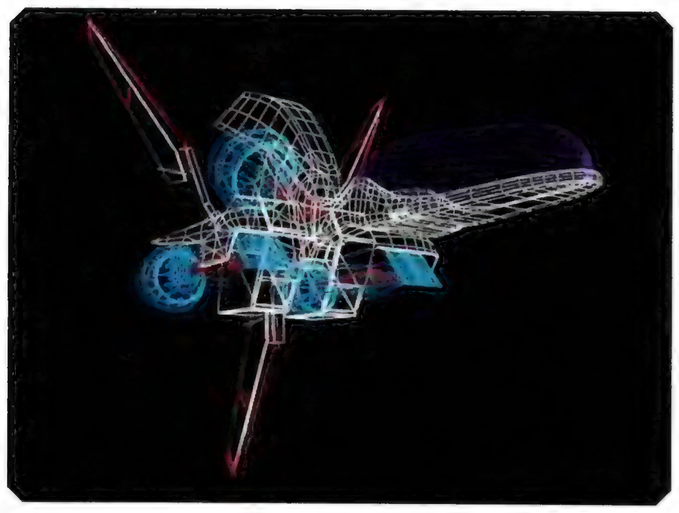
Casey Loe
Contributing Editor

While most genre classics don't hold up to modern scrutiny, a great shooter like R-Type is nearly as enthralling today as it was in 1987. Perhaps this timelessness is part of the reason the genre has withered so; the 2D shooter is nearly extinct, and only a few good 3D series (like Panzer Dragoon) have risen to replace it. Action must be taken now! Everyone write to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and demand that he reunite the R-Type, Darius, and 19XX teams—by force if necessary—and lock them in underground bunkers with nothing but food, water, chemical latrines and Xbox Live Arcade development kits. There they can perfect their art without interference from muckety-muck publishers, 2D-hating consumers and constantly changing technological standards. (Treasure may remain free to continue work on their rumored Ikaruga sequel, but should be monitored by armed U.N. peacekeepers at all times.)

TOP 10s

Best-of series Part 3

shooters!



play staff

TOP 10s

TRADITIONAL / ACTION

Greg Orlando Senior Editor

Traditional

1) 1942 Arcade / Capcom
2) Radiant Silvergun Saturn / Treasure
3) Sinistar Arcade / Williams
4) Gunhed Turbo Grafx 16 / Hudson
5) Panzer Dragoon Orta Xbox / Smilebit
6) Gradius III and IV PlayStation 2 / Konami
7) Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved Xbox Live Arcade / Bizarre
8) Choplifter PC, ColecoVision, Sega Master System
9) G. Darius PlayStation / Taito
10) Axelay Super Nintendo / Konami

Action

1) Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter X360
2) Contra: Hard Corps Genesis / Konami
3) Metal Slug: First Mission Neo Geo Pocket Color / SNK
4) Ratchet and Clank: Going Commando PS2 / Insomniac
5) Robotron 2084 Arcade, Xbox Live Arcade / Midway
6) Metal Arms: Glitch in the System Xbox / Swingin' Ape
7) kill.switch PlayStation 2 / Namco
8) Armed and Dangerous Xbox / Planet Moon
9) Max Payne 2 Xbox / Rockstar
10) Star Wars Battlefront 2 Xbox / LucasArts

Casey Loe Contributing Editor

Traditional

1) Panzer Dragoon Zwei Saturn / Sega
2) Radiant Silvergun Saturn / Treasure
3) G-Darius PlayStation/ Taito
4) R-Type Various / Irem
5) Panzer Dragoon Orta Xbox / Smilebit
6) 1941 Supergrafx / Hudson
7) Lords of Thunder Turbo CD / Hudson
8) Pulstar Neo•Geo / SNK
9) Raiden Turbografx / NEC/Hudosn
10) Ray Storm PlayStation / Taito

Action

1) Gunstar Heroes Genesis / Trasure
2) Silhouette Mirage Saturn / Treasure
3) Super Contra SNES / Konami
4) Ranger X Genesis / Sega
5) Metal Slug Neo•Geo / SNK
6) Super C Arcade / Konami
7) Smash TV Arcade / Midway
8) Gauntlet Various / Midway
9) Quartet Arcade / Midway
10) Zillion Sega Master System / Sega

Dave Halverson Editor In Chief

Traditional

1) Einhander PlayStation / Square
2) Panzer Dragoon Orta Xbox / Smilebit
3) Blazing Star Neo Geo / SNK
4) Silpheed Sega CD / GameArts
5) Keio Flying Squadron Sega CD / JVC
6) Panorama Cotton Mega Drive / Success
7) Aldynes SuperGrafx / Hudson Soft
8) Thunderforce IV Genesis / Technosoft
9) Atomic Robo Kid Genesis / UPL
10) Air Zonk TG 16 / Hudson

Action

1) Sin & Punishment N64 / Treasure
2) Gunvalkyrie Xbox / Smilebit
3) Silhouette Mirage Saturn / Treasure
4) Gunstar Heroes Genesis / Treasure
5) P.N. 03 GameCube / Capcom
6) Red Dog Dreamcast / Argonaut
7) Ranger X Genesis / Sega-Andromeda
8) Ghost in the Shell PlayStation / Exact
9) Contra Hard Corps Genesis / Konami
10) Cannon Spike Dreamcast / Capcom

Mike Griffin PC Editor

Traditional

1) Radiant Silvergun Saturn / Treasure
2) Ikaruga Dreamcast / Treasure
3) Gradius V PS2 / Konami
4) Soukyugurentai Saturn / Raizing
5) Bangai-O Dreamcast / Treasure
6) Panzer Dragoon Zwei Saturn / Sega
7) Tempest 2000 Atari Jaguar / Atari
8) Darius Gaiden Saturn / Taito
9) Pulstar Neo Geo / SNK
10) Gaiares Genesis / Telenet

Action

1) Contra III: Alien Wars SNES / Konami
2) Contra Hard Corps Genesis / Konami
3) Metal Slug 3 Neo Geo / SNK
4) Jackal NES / Konami
5) Cybernator SNES / Konami
6) Ranger X Genesis /
7) Super Turrican 2 SNES / Factor 5
8) Assault Suit Leynos 2 Saturn / NCS
9)Granada Genesis / WolfTeam
10) Max Payne 2 Xbox / Rockstar

Nick Des Barres Japanese Correspondent

Traditional

1) Ikaruga Dreamcast / Treasure
2) Radiant Silvergun Sega Saturn / Treasure
3) Rez PS2 / Sega
4) Panzer Dragoon ORTA Xbox / Sega
5) Viewpoint Neo•Geo / Sammy
6) Einhänder PlayStation / Square
7) Gradius II Arcade / Konami
8) Winds of Thunder PC-Engine Super CD-ROM / Hudson
9) Ai Cho Aniki PC-Engine Super CD-ROM / Nihon Computer System
10) Xevious Arcade / Namco

Action

1) Blaster Master NES / Sunsoft
2) Contra: Shattered Soldier PS2/ Konami
3) Gunstar Heroes Genesis / Treasure
4) Metal Slug 3 Arcade / Nazca
5) Sin & Punishment N64/ Treasure
6) Contra Hard Corps Genesis / Konami
7) Heavy Barrel Arcade / Nihon Bussan
8) Ikari Warriors Arcade / SNK
9) Gain Ground Arcade / Sega
10) The Ninja Sega Master System / Sega

Brady Fiechter Executive Editor

Traditional

1) Radiant Silvergun Saturn / Treasure
2) Panzer Dragoon Zwei Saturn / Sega
3) Life Force NES / Konami
4) Thuderforce IV Genesis / Technosoft
5) Silpheed Sega CD / GameArts
6) Einhander PS / Square
7) Geometry Wars Xbox 360 / Bizarre Creations
8) Ikaruga DC / Treasure
9) R-Type Final PS2
10) Axelay SNES / Konami

Action

1) Sin and Punishment N64 / Treasure
2) Contra NES / Konami
3) Super Contra SNES / Konami
4) Loaded PS / Interplay
5) MDK2 DC / Bioware
6) Gunvalkyrie Xbox / Sega
7) Metal Slug 3 Neo Geo / SNK
8) Ikari Warriors NES / SNK
9) Silhouette Mirage Saturn / Treasure
10) Russian Attack NES / Konami

Eric Patterson Contributing Editor

Traditional

1) Galaga Xbox Live Arcade / Namco Bandai
2) Terra Cresta Arcade / Nichibutsu
3) Twin Cobra Arcade / Toaplan
4) Mars Matrix Dreamcast / Capcom
5) Gaiares Genesis / Telenet
6) Trouble Shooter Genesis / Vic Tokai
7) Sky Kid NES / Namco
8) Twinkle Star Sprites Dreamcast / SNK
9) Gunbird 2 Dreamcast / Psikyo
10) Sexy Parodius Saturn / Konami

Action

1) Pocky & Rocky SNES / Natsume
2) Target Earth Genesis / Masaya
3) Gauntlet Xbox Live Arcade / Midway
4) Space Harrier Saturn / Sega
5) Shock Troopers NeoGeo / SNK
6) Metal Slug 3 NeoGeo / SNK
7) Zombies Ate My Neighbors SNES / LucasArts
8) Cannon Spike Dreamcast / Capcom
9) Heavy Barrel - Arcade / Data East
10) Rolling Thunder 2 - Genesis / Namco

Mike Hobbs Art Director

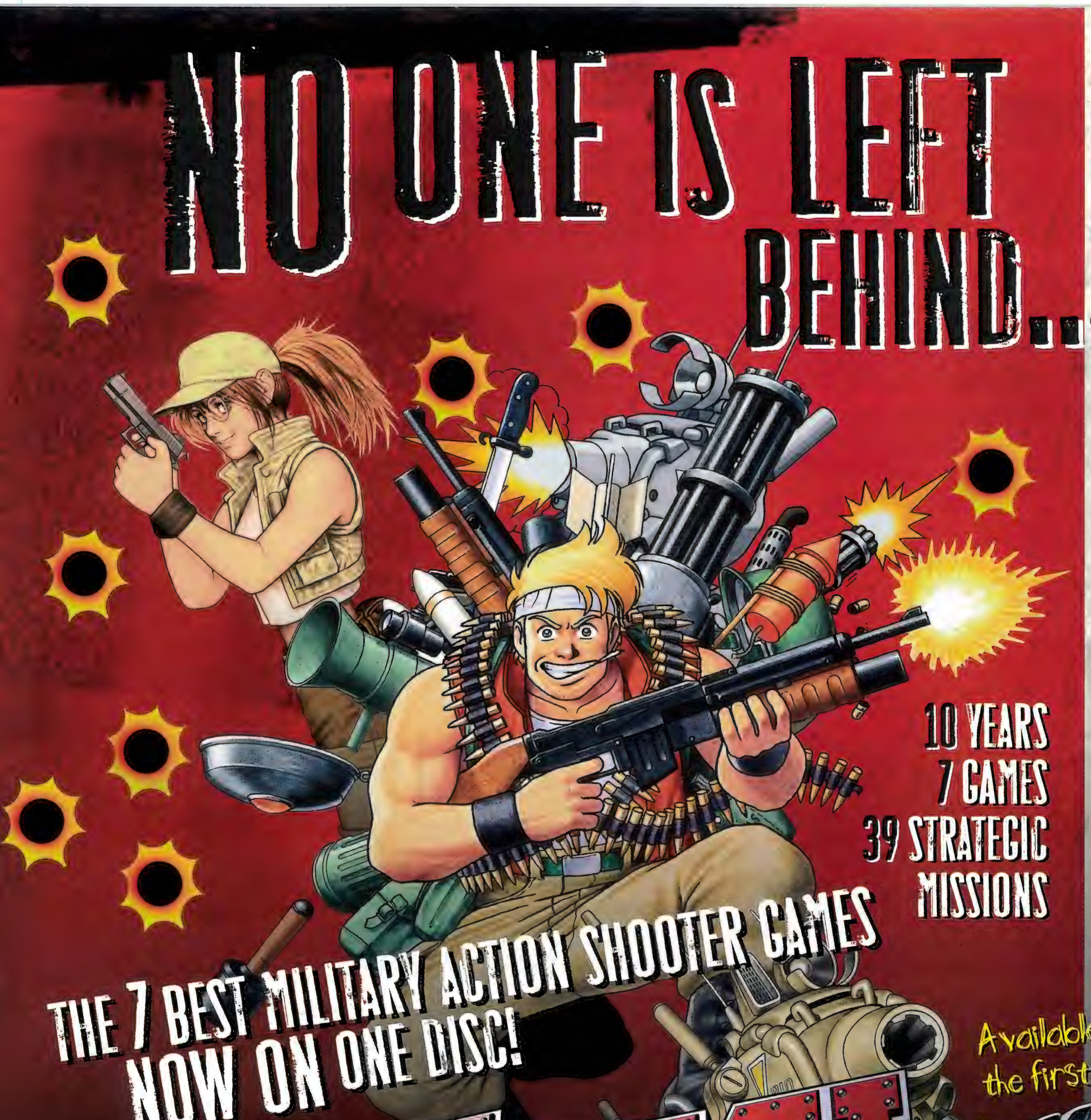
Traditional

1) Radiant Silvergun Saturn / Treasure
2) Ikaruga Dreamcast / Treasure
3) Star Fox 64 / N64 / Nintendo
4) Axelay SNES / Konami
5) Panzer Dragoon Saturn / Sega
6. R-Type Delta PlayStation / Irem
7) Bangai-O Dreamcast / Treasure
8) Darius Gaiden Saturn / Taito
9) Silpheed Sega CD / GameArts
10) Tempest 2000 Atari Jaguar / Atari

Action

1) Sin & Punishment N64 / Treasure
2) Gunvalkyrie XBox / Smilebit
3) Gunstar Heroes Genesis / Treasure
4) Contra NES / Konami
5) Neo Contra PS2 / Konami
6) Ranger X Genesis / Sega
7) Metal Slug 3 Neo Geo / SNK
8) Contra Hard Corps Genesis / Konami
9) Blaster Master NES / Sunsoft
10) PN03 GameCube / Capcom

NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND...



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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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Nick Des Barres

Dai Kohama

TGS 2006 SPECIAL part 1

Nick Des Barres & Dai Kohama

Shows just prior to system launches are always the most memorable, remaining in mind long after mid-generation events fade into a mess of bright lights, big breasts and crushing crowds. I have little doubt Tokyo Game Show 2006 will prove to be any exception, as it provided the first tangible, concrete PlayStation 3 experience, with 27 playable games running on actual, finalized hardware (as opposed to the monolithic development units at E3), and has proved to many a fickle Japanese gamer that the system actually exists, is in fact quite powerful, and *really is* coming out on November 11th.

It's safe to say this was Sony's show, despite the strongest showing Microsoft has ever made in Japan, with an RPG-heavy lineup for 2007. Disappointingly, Nintendo would not allow the unwashed masses (192,411 attendees this year -- the most ever) to get their hands on Wii at Tokyo Game Show, and the only systems at the show were demonstrated at the Konami and Sega booths by svelte "campaign girls" (the Japanese term for "booth babe"). This is a puzzling choice; the platform was for all intents and purposes completely absent from the show, allowing Sony to steal virtually all the available thunder. Seriously, Nintendo, we love ya, but it's time to get off the private-show high horse and show the public why radical new control is better than all the tech in the world. Back in PS3 Land, Capcom's Devil May Cry 4 and Sega's Virtua Fighter 5, fully playable, were particularly impressive, and surprise debuts like Level-5's White Knight Story and Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden Sigma did much to bolster credibility for a platform beleaguered with nothing but bad press.

Xbox 360 had as good a showing as can possibly be imagined for a system with only 160,000 units sold (less than a thirtieth of what it has sold in the West), and seems to be on its way to modest success in Japan, due largely to a surprisingly robust RPG lineup headlined by Hironobu Sakaguchi's Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey. With other triple-A titles like Capcom's Lost Odyssey on the horizon, the system could finally find a solid niche among hard-core Japanese gamers, conceivably moving one to two million units in the upcoming year.

"It's safe to say this was Sony's show, despite the strongest showing Microsoft has ever made in Japan..."

We now present for your review the key games on display, along with glimpses at various aspects of what makes the Tokyo Game Show so whimsical and decidedly *un*-trade show. Next month, watch for Part 2 of our show coverage, with closer looks at promising titles and developer interviews.

	Top 10 Playable Games
01	**Lost Planet** Capcom / Xbox 360
02	**Devil May Cry 4** Capcom / PlayStation 3
03	**Blue Dragon** Microsoft / Xbox 360
04	**Virtua Fighter 5** Sega / PlayStation 3
05	**Trusty Bell/Eternal Sonata** Microsoft / Xbox 360
06	**Lost Odyssey** Microsoft / Xbox 360
07	**The Eye of Judgment** Sony / PlayStation 3
08	**MGS: Portable Ops** Kojima Productions / PSP
09	**Dragon Quest Monsters Joker**Square Enix / NDS
10	**Seiken Densetsu 4** Dawn of Mana Square Enix / PS2

	Top 10 Unplayable Games
01	**Metal Gear Solid 4** Kojima Productions / PS3
02	**White Knight Story** Sony / PlayStation 3
03	**Ninja Gaiden Sigma** Tecmo / PlayStation 3
04	**Fabula Nova Crystallis: FF XIII** Square Enix / Various
05	**Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII** Square Enix / PSP
06	**Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom** Blueside / XB360
07	**Sonic and the Secret Rings** Sega / Wii
08	**Heroes** Spike / Wii
09	**Samurai Spirits Sen** SNK Playmore / Arcade
10	**Infinite Undiscovery** Microsoft / Xbox 360

Biggest Surprise

TGS 2006

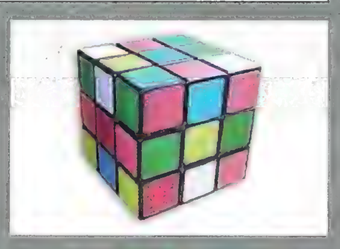
Three-Way Tie: Xbox 360 Dominating J-RPGs For 2007 / Xbox 360 To Sell For ¥29,800 Packed-In With Blue Dragon / PS3 Breaks ¥50000 Barrier

Who woulda thunk it? Just as Xbox 360 seems poised for actual, if modest, success in Japan, just about every major non-Square Enix, non-Sony Japanese RPG seems to be coming out on the console in 2007. tri-Ace's Infinite Undiscovery, tri-Crescendo's Trusty Bell/Eternal Sonata, and of course Mistwalker's Blue Dragon, Lost Odyssey and Cry On. The 360 looks to be RPG Central in 2007, and I don't think anyone could have predicted it...nor the fact that Microsoft would bite a *massive* bullet and sell the system packed-in with Blue Dragon for an astounding ¥29800 ($253). The other major surprise of the show came in the form of Ken Kutaragi listlessly announcing a ¥49800 price point for the 20GB PlayStation 3, along with the fact it *will* have an HDMI port. This is clearly put up or shut up time for Sony; with the Xbox going for peanuts and Wii looming, they're going to have to play hardball.

Top 5 Least Necessary Games

TGS 2006

01	**Railfan** Ongakukan / PlayStation 3
02	**Stock Trading Trainer: Kabutore!** Konami / NDS
03	**Rubik's Cube & Friends That Anyone Can Play** Digital Works Entertainment / Nintendo DS
04	**The Maid Clothes & Machine Gun** D3 Publisher / PS2
05	**Dead Or Alive Xtreme 2** Tecmo / Xbox 360



There were more than 570 games at TGS this year, and the vast majority are utter crap from no-name software houses. While there were almost certainly *less* necessary games than these at the show, we present a sampling of legitimate talent wasting their resources on major hardware. First we have Railfan, an FMV (not realtime polygon!) passenger train sim on *PlayStation 3*. Pick up passengers, drop them off, watch the tracks go by. Yeah, work those SPEs! Kojima denies us a Policenauts sequel because he feels the need to educate Japanese housewives about stock trading on DS, while Digital Works produces a version of Rubik's Cube (!!) on DS that "Anyone Can Play". What, manipulating physical plastic cubes is too difficult? Finally, D3 blesses us with the ability to dress up as a French maid and shoot a big gun, while Team Ninja decides a true DOA or Ninja Gaiden sequel is less important than soft porn.

Biggest Question

TGS 2006

What In God's Name Is Afrika?

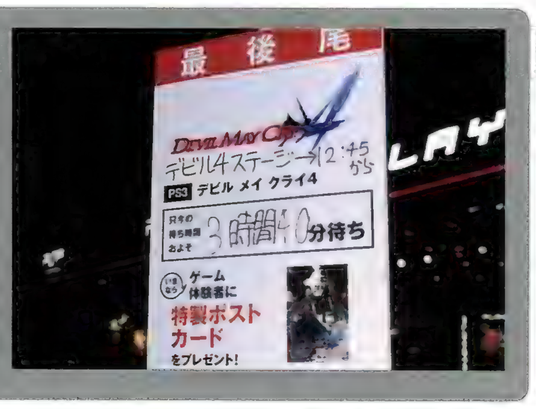
It's been two shows now, and all we know about Sony Japan's Afrika is that it's *really* pretty. But is there a game, or is it just a screensaver? It's been confirmed that the game is *not* a hunting sim, and that's about all we can tell you. But hey, check out that high dynamic range lighting and sweet bumpmapping, yo!

Longest Line

TGS 2006

Devil May Cry 4

The longest wait at the show (though not atypical for high-profile games) was unquestionably Capcom's Devil May Cry 4. Fans wishing to see for themselves how new protagonist Nero differs from suddenly old-hat Dante (Hint: He doesn't) had to wait up to four hours in line for ten minutes of gameplay; our photograph reads 3:40.

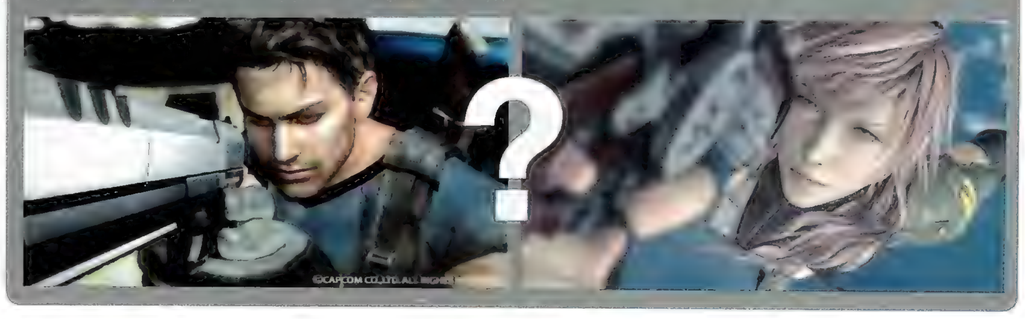


Biggest Disappointment

TGS 2006

Whither Final Fantasy XIII and Bio Hazard 5?

Yes, I *know* Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy XIII was on display at Tokyo Game Show, and we did get our first look at Agito. But Square Enix's tentpole -- the game on which the future of the company rests upon -- gets 15 seconds of new footage added to the four-month-old E3 trailer? That's just not right. Further, Capcom's most significant announced game is a complete no-show, after wowing us last year with a glimpse at Mr. Chris Redfield and a new desert setting.



Sony Computer Entertainment

"The launch and near-launch PlayStation 3 games all looked solid..."

Sony threw down their usual football field-sized booth this year, complete with trademark 300-inch screen running a demo loop of all PlayStation 3 games at the show. It was here we caught our first glimpse of Level-5's (Dragon Quest VIII, Rogue Knight) PlayStation 3 debut, White Knight Story, a stunning-looking consistent-world RPG that already appears to be well into development. The launch and near-launch PlayStation 3 games at the booth, all apparently running on finalized hardware in production cases (six in 1080p!) all looked solid, with a visual sheen generally equivalent to the best-looking Xbox 360 games. Particularly notable was The Eye of Judgment, using next-generation EyeToy technology that tracks physical cards in three dimensions; and unique download-only offering flOw from SCEA, taking place in the microscopic world of sea plankton and controlled entirely with the SIXAXIS tilt-sensing feature. On the PSP front, Sony still shows laudable commitment to the platform despite being utterly and totally beat by DS in Japan. Jeanne D'Arc, again from Level-5, which fantasizes Joan of Arc's story as a tactical RPG, looks especially nice.

What Was Hot

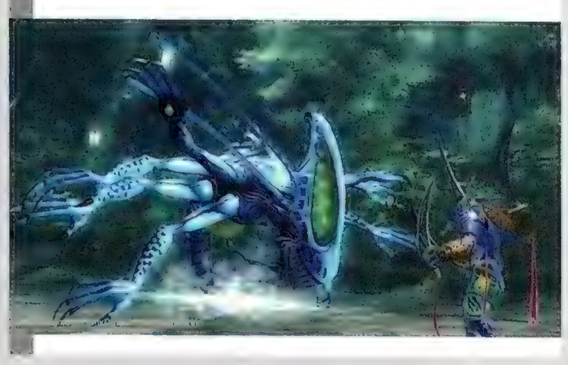
GAMES PICTURED PLUS...

Afrika SCEJ/Rhino Studio / PlayStation 3
Heavenly Sword -SCEE/Ninja Theory / PlayStation 3
Resistance: Fall of Man SCEA/Insomniac Games / PS3
Jeanne D'Arc SCEJ/Level-5 / PSP
Parappa the Rapper SCEJ / PSP
Ape Escape Racer SCEJ / PSP
Kingdom of Paradise 2 SCEJ / PSP
Thinking EXIT Taito / PSP

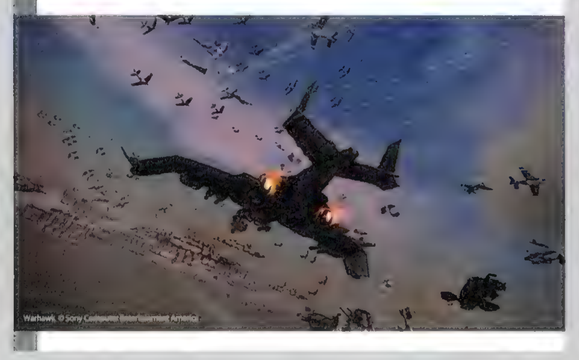
White Knight Story/Shirokishi Monogatari SCEJ, Level-5 / PlayStation 3

Gran Turismo HD SCEJ, Polyphony Digital / PlayStation 3

The Eye of Judgment SCEJ / PlayStation 3



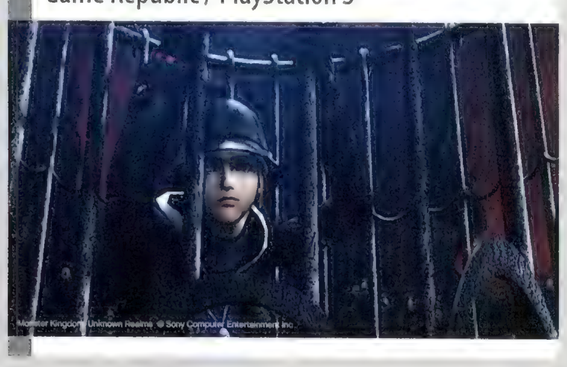
Warhawk SCEA / PlayStation 3



flOw SCEA / PlayStation 3

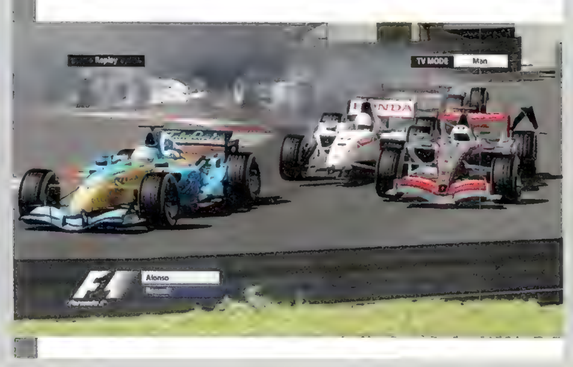
Genji: Kamui Souran SCEJ, Game Republic / PlayStation 3

Monster Kingdom: Unknown Realms SCEJ, Game Republic / PlayStation 3



Everybody's Golf 5 SCEJ / PlayStation 3

F-1 Championship SCEE / PlayStation 3



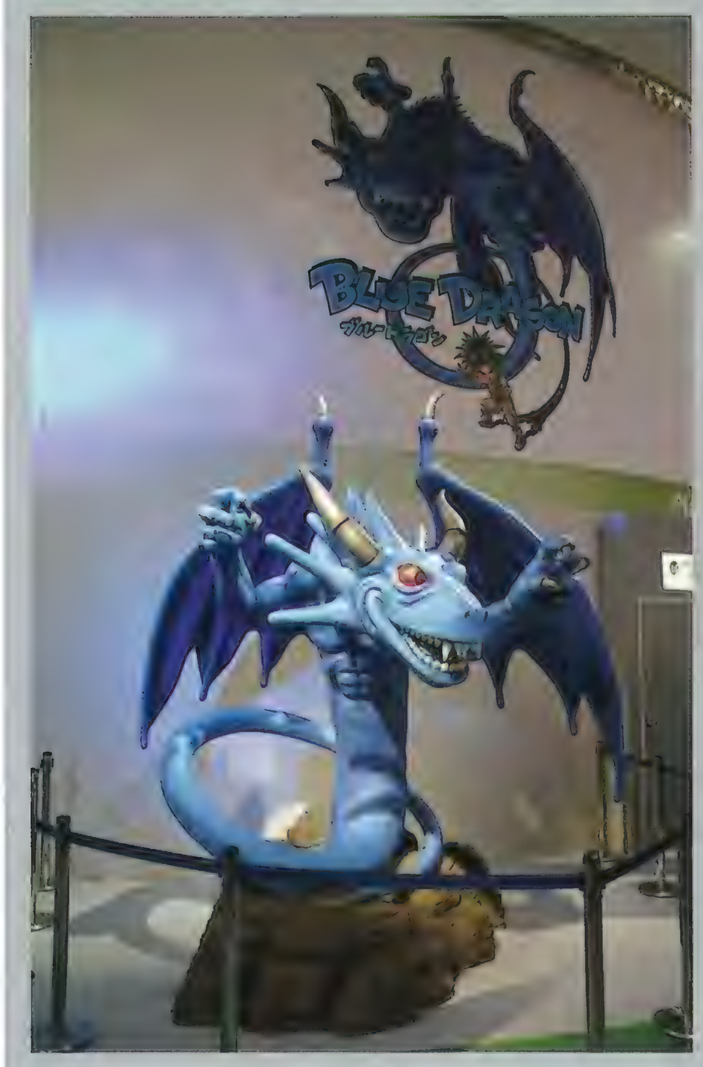
Lair SCEA / PlayStation 3

MotorStorm SCEE, Evolution Studios / PlayStation 3

Microsoft

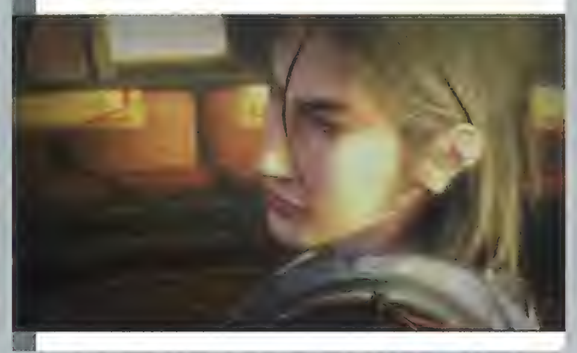
"The standouts at this show were obviously the playable demos of Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey..."

After getting mightily hammered since the Xbox 360 launch last November (only 160,000 machines sold), Microsoft rebounded in admirable fashion, with general post-show sentiment holding that the platform might actually have a fighting chance as a hardcore-gamer niche platform in Japan, perhaps eventually attaining PC-Engine/Mega Drive-level success. The standouts at this show were obviously the playable demos of Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey, both absolutely gorgeous, if sporting game systems straight outta 1991. But hey -- turn-based, random-encounter RPGs, the Japanese just eat 'em up, and I'll always have a soft spot for them myself. Plenty of other home-grown product was also on display, like D3 Publisher's Oneechanbara vorteX and Earth Defense Force 3 (both expanded versions of the two most popular Simple 2000 PlayStation 2 games), Success's beautifully-designed strategy RPG Operation Darkness, and token Tactics clone Diario from Idea Factory. tri-Ace's (Star Ocean, Valkyrie Profile) newly-revealed Infinite Undiscovery was represented with but a single screenshot, but *man* does it look tasty.



Blue Dragon Microsoft, Mistwalker, Artoon / Xbox 360

Lost Odyssey Microsoft, Mistwalker, Feelplus / Xbox 360



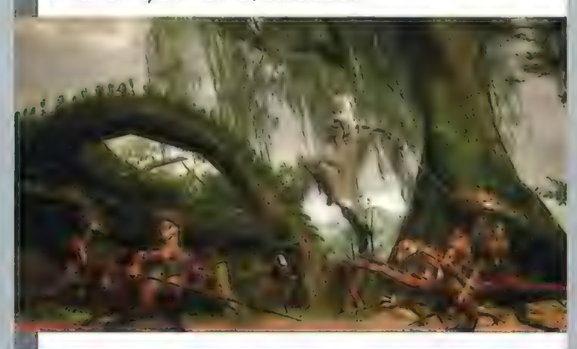
Infinite Undiscovery Microsoft, tri-Ace / Xbox 360

What Was Hot

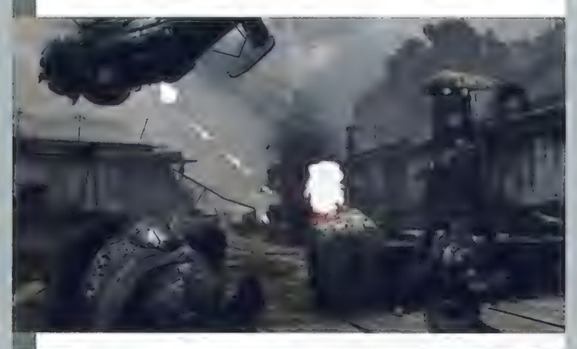
GAMES PICTURED PLUS...

Via Piñata Microsoft, Rare / Xbox 360
Earth Defense Force 3 D3 Publisher / Xbox 360

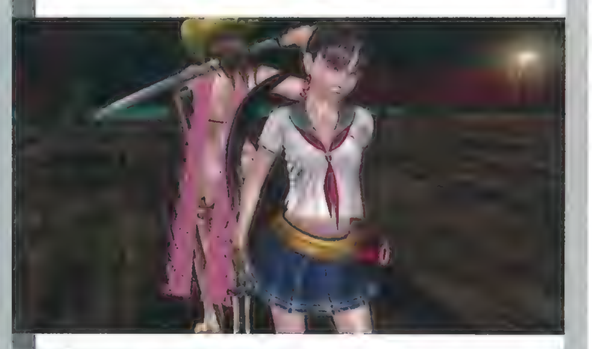
Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom Microsoft, Blueside / Xbox 360



Gears of War Microsoft, Epic Games / Xbox 360



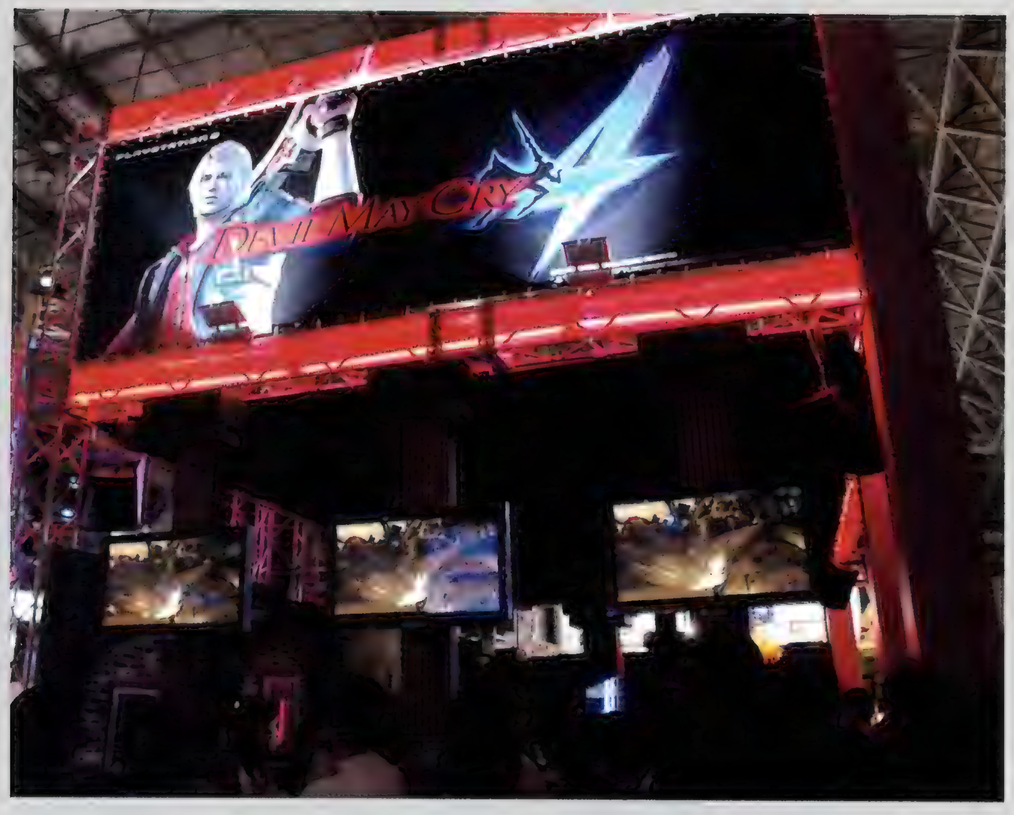
Oneechanbara vorteX D3 Publisher / Xbox 360



Operation Darkness Success / Xbox 360

Vampire Rain AQ Interactive / Xbox 360

Diario Idea Factory / Xbox 360



What Was Hot

GAMES PICTURED PLUS...

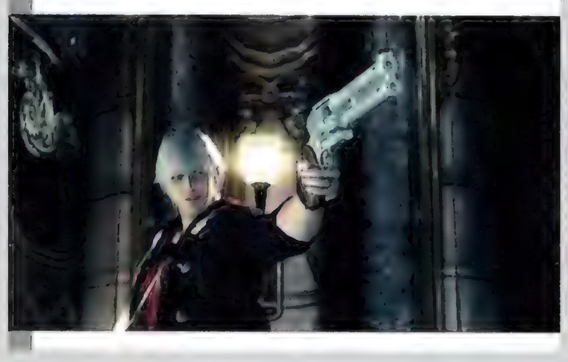
Monster Hunter Portable/Freedom 2 Capcom / PSP

Capcom

"Lost Planet is our unequivocal choice for Game of Show, looking and playing deliriously fantastic, technically lightyears beyond the already-lovely Dead Rising."

What Capcom lacked in quantity this year was definitely made up in quality. Lost Planet is our unequivocal choice for Game of Show, looking and playing deliriously fantastic, technically lightyears beyond the already-lovely Dead Rising. Devil May Cry 4 was similarly beautiful, if completely cloning the gameplay of DMC3. I'm not complaining, though; when you have a game engine this solid, a sea change in its mechanics would be counter intuitive. The fourth installment of Gyakuten Saiban/Phoenix Wright, everyone's favorite cult legal digital comic dramedy, continues the series in breathlessly quirky fashion -- but with Part II not yet released in America, it'll probably be quite a while before it sees release here. The games were fine indeed, but Capcom's heavily-themed booth, easily the most impressive at the show (gothic church for DMC, courtroom for Phoenix Wright, and pub for Monster Hunter Freedom 2) almost outshone them.

Devil May Cry 4 Capcom / PlayStation 3



Lost Planet Capcom / Xbox 360

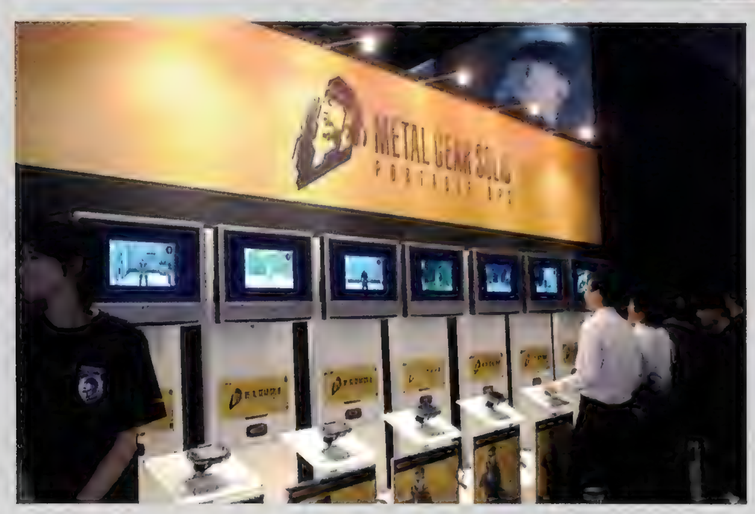
Gyakuten Saiban 4/Phoenix Wright 4 Capcom / Nintendo DS

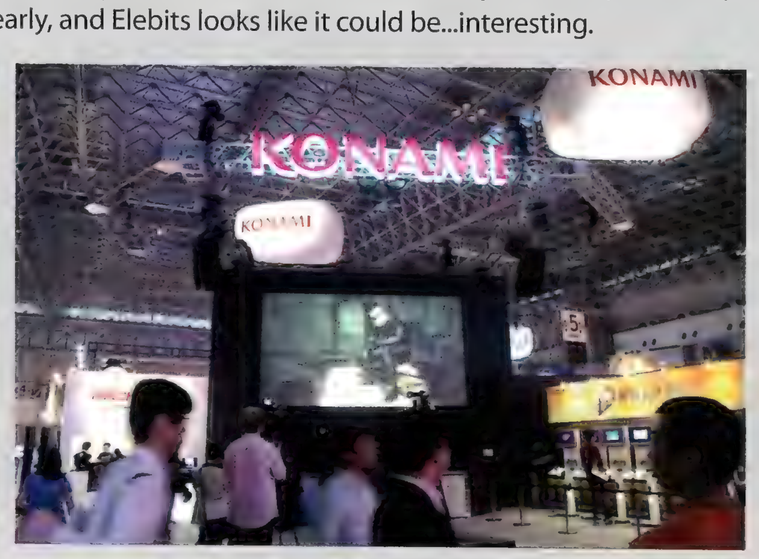
Ryusei no Rockman/Mega Man Star Force Capcom / Nintendo DS

Konami

"...the new MGS4 trailer was -- as we can pretty much expect by now -- riveting."

Konami's reliance on Kojima Productions is getting eerie, yo. Fully half of all the games at their booth this year were products of the studio, and I worry both for Hideo Kojima's genius being stretched thin, as well as the unfortunate de-emphasis the company's other stellar teams are receiving. I mean, IGA's Castlevania: PoR wasn't even *playable*. That's not cool. With that said, however, the new MGS4 trailer was -- as we can pretty much expect by now -- riveting. Consisting entirely of gameplay footage, numerous new mechanics were introduced and/or fleshed-out, and *boy howdy* did the final, famous Kojima "sting" at the end get tongues wagging (if you haven't been on the internet for a month, it's a glimpse of a young Snake). I maintain this is simply Old Snake having fun with his new Octocam suit, projecting a younger vision of himself, but with Kojima, you never know. Portable Ops looked similarly juicy, offering a main-continuity, true Metal Gear experience on PSP, with a youthful Colonel Roy Campbell and a mysterious new ninja character known as Null (resembling nobody so much as a young Grey Fox) shown for the first time. It's not all The Kojima Show, however; FPS Coded Arms Assault on PS3 was pretty if very early, and Elebits looks like it could be...interesting.





What Was Hot

GAMES PICTURED...

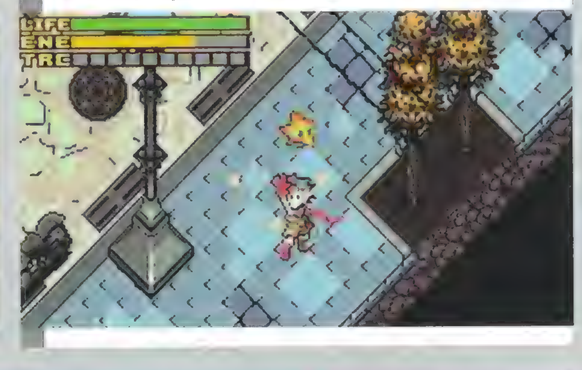
Metal Gear Solid 4 Konami, Kojima Productions / PlayStation 3

Coded Arms Assault Konami / PlayStation 3

Elebits Konami / Wii

Metal Gear Solid Portable Ops Konami, Kojima Productions / PSP

Boktai: Django & Sabata/Lunar Knights Konami, Kojima Productions / Nintendo DS



Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin Konami / Nintendo DS

Sega

"[Virtua Fighter 5] is arcade-perfect in every conceivable way..."

Well, it's all about Virtua Fighter 5, innit? The first home installment of the series to use the exact same, unexpurgated models and textures from the arcade version, and reportedly ported to PlayStation 3 in just four weeks (likely a result of both the PS3 and arcade board Lindbergh sporting GeForce 7-derived hardware), is arcade-perfect in every conceivable way. All Sega has to do now is add its various home version-exclusive features, and one of the most important launch-window PS3 titles in Japan is signed, sealed, delivered. Sonic on both PS3 and 360 seems unchanged from its E3 incarnation, though Secret Rings on Wii seems like genuine fun, having come a long way since its Los Angeles debut as Sonic Wildfire. If only we could have played it. On the current (or is it last, already?)-gen tip, Sega offers up a quickie sequel to Yakuza, using the exact same engine as the first, set in Osaka, and Shining Force EXA, looking solid and definitely better than the mediocre Neo.

Ryu Ga Gotoku/Yakuza 2 Sega / PlayStation 2

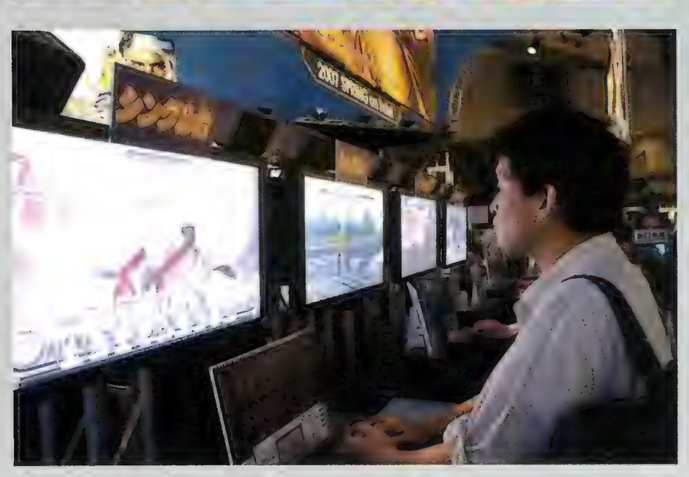
What Was Hot

GAMES PICTURED...

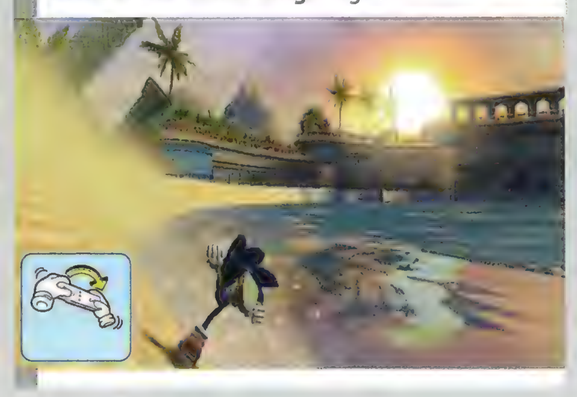
Virtua Fighter 5 Sega / PlayStation 3

Sonic The Hedgehog Sega, Sonic Team / PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

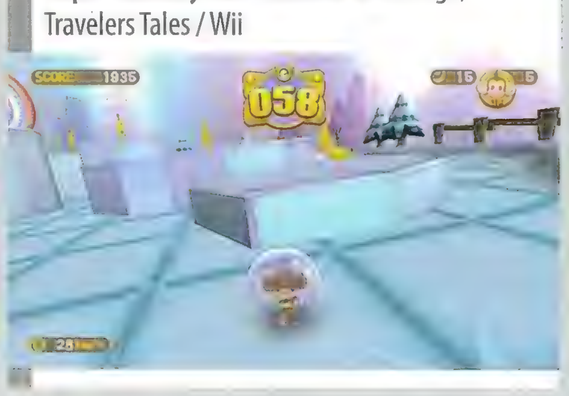
Armored Core 4 From Software / PlayStation 3



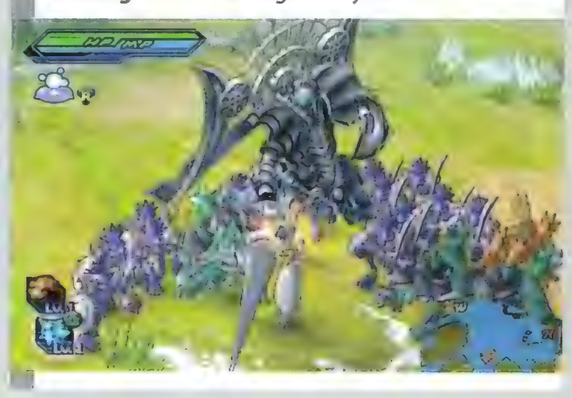
Sonic & The Secret Rings Sega / Wii



Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz Sega, Travelers Tales / Wii



Shining Force EXA Sega / PlayStation 2



Square Enix

"Crisis Core wasn't playable after some two years in development, and the choice not to show any significant new footage of FFXIII is simply baffling."

Whoa. Square Enix is officially *making love* to the Nintendo DS. As it stands, they'll have at least *eight* games for the platform in stores within a six-month or so window. Luckily, they all look sweet and syrupy: DQM Joker sports the best 3-D the DS has ever seen, Tetsuya Nomura's latest vanity project, "Street RPG" Subarashiki Kono Sekai looks genuinely interesting with dual control of two characters on each screen simultaneously, and the still very-early-in-development Revenant Wings: FFXII came as something of a shock. The ending of the PS2 original doesn't exactly seem to lead in to a sequel, and yet that's exactly what Revenant is: A direct sequel to FFXII, starring Vaan and Penelo. Perhaps even more surprising was the full 3-D, full voice remake of the GBA's Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories on PS2, to be handled by the Musashiden team. All well and good, but I'm miffed that Crisis Core wasn't playable after some two years in development, and the choice not to show any significant new footage of FFXIII is simply baffling.

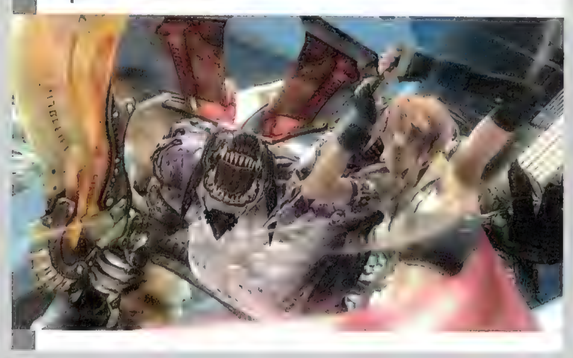
Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy XIII

What Was Hot

GAMES PICTURED PLUS...

Heroes of Mana Square / Nintendo DS
Front Mission 1st Square / Nintendo DS
Final Fantasy VII Advent Children Complete Square / Blu-ray Disc (Movie)

Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy XIII Square / Various



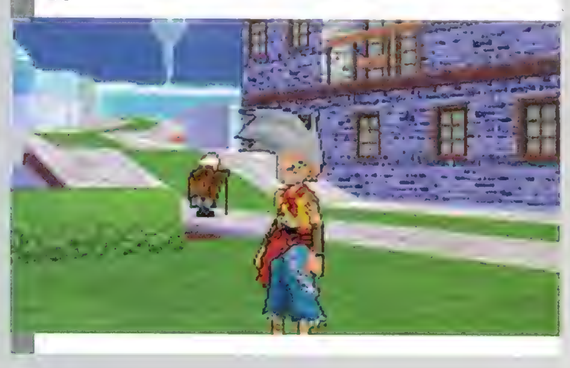
Seiken Densetsu 4/Dawn of Mana Square / Various

Kingdom Hearts II Final Mix/Kingdom Hearts Re:Chain of Memories Square / PS2

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII Square / PSP

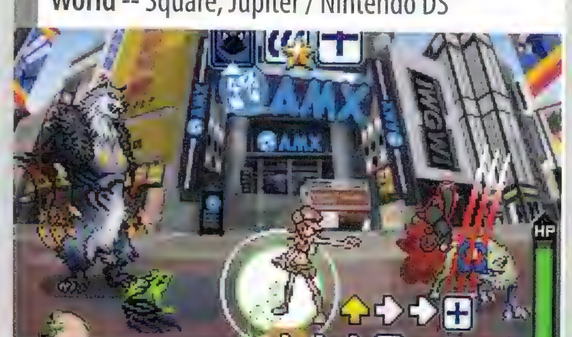
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings Square / Nintendo DS

Dragon Quest Monsters Joker Enix / Nintendo DS



Chocobo & The Magic Picturebook Square / Nintendo DS

Subarashiki Kono Sekai: It's A Wonderful World -- Square, Jupiter / Nintendo DS



Bandai Namco

"Of special note to both Play Japan editors was Jojo's Bizarre Adventure, based on chapter 1 of the comic and looking *di molto* good."

Bandai Namco's standout game this year is unquestionably the delightful Xbox 360 RPG Eternal Sonata, by tri-Crescendo of Baten Kaitos fame. It's arguably more interesting than either Blue Dragon or Lost Odyssey, with vibrant stylized visuals and a fun, semi-realtime combat system. Ridge Racer 7 was predictably slick, running in 1080p at 60fps, exuding the series's trademark "real unreality", and both 360 and PS3 Gundams look sufficiently next-gen. Of special note to both Play Japan editors, being manic fans of the manga, was Jojo's Bizarre Adventure, based on chapter 1 of the comic and looking *di molto* good. On the handheld front, Bandai Namco continues to be one of the few third parties truly committed to PSP development, with Ace Combat X, the Tales series "all stars" game Radiant Mythology, and Gundam Battle Royale.

What Was Hot

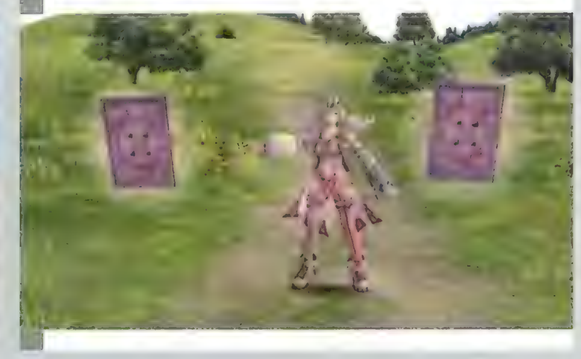
GAMES PICTURED PLUS...

Mobile Suit Gundam: Operation Troy Bandai / Xbox 360
Tales of the World: Radiant Mythology Namco / PSP
Gundam Battle Royale Bandai / PSP

Ridge Racer 7 Namco / PlayStation 3

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire Bandai / PlayStation 3

Culdcept Saga Omiya Soft / Xbox 360



Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: Phantom Blood Bandai / PlayStation 2

Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception Namco / PSP

Trusty Bell/Eternal Sonata Namco, tri-Crescendo / Xbox 360

Tecmo

"Team Ninja redeems itself with a grounds-up remake of Ninja Gaiden Xbox on PlayStation 3, fully re-modeled and -textured."

Pointless soft porn *no,* Ninja Gaiden Sigma *yes.* Look, the Dead Or Alive girls are hot. We know this. But you know what? There's a fine selection of quality Dead Or Alive dojinshi out there, making the comparatively tame Xtreme series moot. It's okay, though, because Team Ninja redeems itself with a grounds-up remake of Ninja Gaiden Xbox on PlayStation 3, fully re-modeled and -textured, with new areas, weapons, bosses and the ability to play as buxom battleaxe-wielding Rachel. Cronos, however, still remains a mystery. Tecmo's other offerings included the derivative-looking golf game Pangya on Wii, and the sequel to last year's well-received Tokobot on PlayStation 2, Korobot Adventure.

What Was Hot

GAMES PICTURED...

Swing Golf Pangya Tecmo, Ntreev Soft / Wii

Ninja Gaiden Sigma Tecmo, Team Ninja / PlayStation 3

Dead Or Alive Xtreme 2 Tecmo, Team Ninja / Xbox 360

Korobot Adventure Tecmo / PlayStation 2

SNK Playmore

"...finally, the big news: One hundred percent re-drawn from scratch 2-D King of Fighters XII."

SNK may very well be *back*. A trio of new arcade projects were announced, from least to most exciting: KOF Maximum Impact Regulation "A", a version of the Maximum Impact series with Ash Crimson for arcade; Samurai Spirits Sen, a fully polygonal, all-new Samurai game; and finally, the big news: *One hundred percent re-drawn from scratch 2-D King of Fighters XII.* Yes, I felt the need to italicize that entire sentence, and for good reason -- the 12-year-old sprites from the Neo•Geo era are finally being thrown out. 'Tis a wondrous day. Metal Slug Complete, collecting the entire series (even X!) on PSP was looking tight, and the DS revival of the most well-loved and popular Neo•Geo Pocket series of all time, SNK VS. Capcom Card Fighters, should prove to be a blast.

SNK VS. Capcom Card Fighters DS SNK Playmore / Nintendo DS

Metal Slug Complete SNK Playmore / PSP

What Was Hot

GAMES PICTURED PLUS...

Samurai Spirits Sen SNK Playmore / Arcade
King of Fighters XII SNK Playmore / Arcade
King of Fighters Maximum Impact Regulation "A" SNK Playmore / Arcade

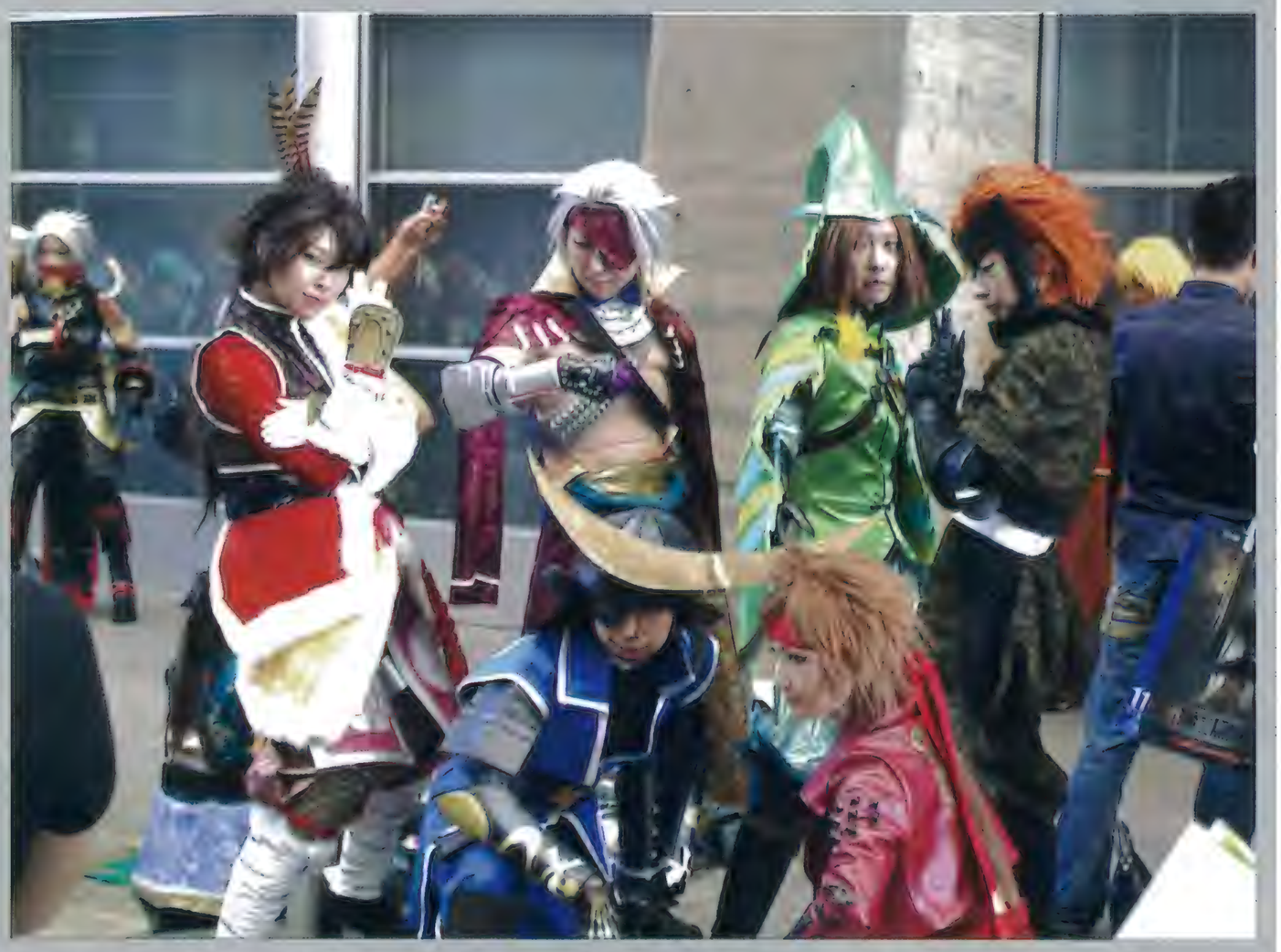
SWAG @ TGS 2006

"Swag" at TGS takes a slightly different form than at most video game shows, because you gotta pay for it. Most major third-parties have separate booths set up for the express purpose of selling licensed game goods, ranging from music CDs, to apparel, to *dakimakura* "hugging pillows" (ahem), to plush toys, to exclusive limited figures and statues. Enjoy this gallery of trinkets you shall likely never get your hands on.

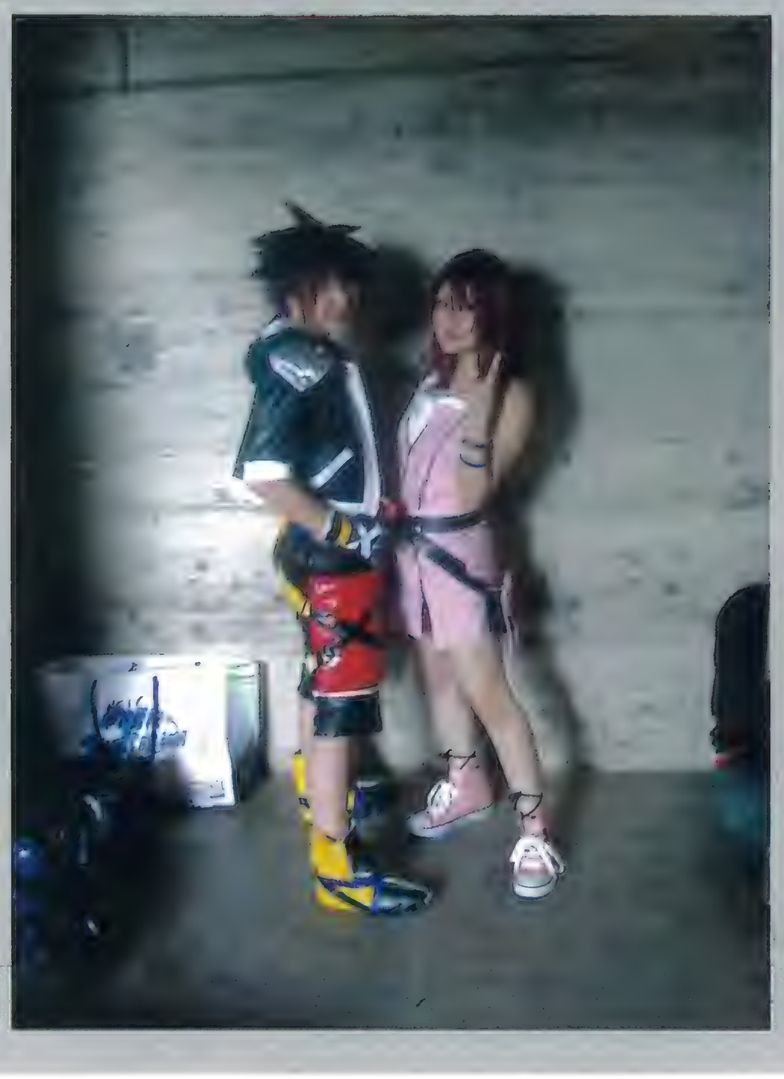
COSPLAY @ TGS 2006

What Japanese gaming event would be complete without the requisite Cosplay contingent? As usual, Tetsuya Nomura-designed characters make up approximately 70% of the costumes on display, but there's plenty of diamonds in the rough, as can be seen below. I'm especially diggin' the Final Fantasy XIII heroine, and quintet of FFXII Frans. Woof!

▲ Dante, Devil May Cry 3



▲ Devil Kings posse



Sora & Kairi, Kingdom Hearts II ▶

◀ Heroine, Final Fantasy XIII & Kika, Suikoden IV

play
Staff "Round-up"

.hack//G.U. Rebirth 076
Tales of the Abyss 077
Final Fantasy XII 080
Tokobot 082
Avatar: The Last Airbender 083
Destroy All Humans 2 084
God Hand 085
Godfather 085
DBZ Tankaichi 2 086
Naruto CoN 2 086
Yggdra Union 095
Death Jr. 2 096
Gangs of London 098
Work Time Fun 102
Naruto NC 2 102
Powerstone Collection 102

Reviews

November 2006

Dave Halverson
Editor in Chief

Favorite genres: Platformers, adventure, 2D action , racing, RPGs, and open-world **Now playing:** Death Jr. 2, Bladewitch **Favorite movie-based game:** Addams Family Values **Favorite TV-based game:** Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Dave can't seem to let go of the past or get enough of the future, causing a strange genetic abnormality to take place. Immune to the burden of sleep or adulthood E Storm plays games new and old, both console and handheld by day, and fades away into any number of strange Japanese cartoons by night leaving only time to write it all down and ponder the true meaning of the universe.

Brady Fiechter
Executive Editor

Favorite genres: Adventure, first-person shooters, action, RPGs **Now playing:** Dead Rising **Favorite movie-based game:** Lord of the Rings **TV-based game:** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Under constant pressure by a friend to flee the country and study the ways of the Thaoist, Brady continues to balk, proclaiming that his spiritual journey lies in movies and games. He finds joyful satisfaction in killing things, namely zombies and soldiers and evil creatures, which tend to pop up in some of his favorite genres.

Greg Orlando
Senior Editor

Favorite genres: RPGs, action, adventure, fighting, wrestling **Now playing:** God Hand **Favorite movie-based game:** Lego Star Wars II **TV-based game:** Simpsons Hit & Run

Of Greg Orlando, historians agree that he is, without question, the finest human being to be mentioned in this sentence. A veteran of the Cola Wars thrice decorated, Orlando understands the universe's great solitary truth: If the mule don't kick, you know the mule don't ride. He is currently missing, presumed pantsless...

Mike Griffin
PC Editor

Favorite genres: MMORPGs, first-person shooters, action-adventure **Now playing:** Battlefield 2142 **Favorite movie-based game:** Chronicles of Riddick **TV-based game:** Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Even as a wee lad playing Zaxxon on Coleco, the technology and artistry of game design has always fascinated Mike. He thinks some games are timeless in that respect, whether 2D, 3D, flat-shaded or bump mapped. Mike's goal is to equip the readers with accurate information, so that limited funds and time can be put to good use.

The play rating system

10...Perfect
9....Extraordinary
8....Great
7....Good
6....Decent
5....Average
4....Below average
3....Poor
2....Bad
1....Terrible

Nick Des Barres
Japan Editor

Favorite genres: RPGs, Action, Fighting **Now playing:** Rupee Land, Eyu Densetsu **Favorite movie-based game:** Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis **Favorite TV-based game:** Unosel Yabusame DMF

Nick fondly remembers the first video game he ever played: Trojan, by Capcom, on the NES. He wishes he could claim even earlier gaming-roots, and the modern-day Nick would probably be affronted by the reference to "Trojan" and insist it be called "Tatakai No Banka (Elegy For Battle)", but the fact remains that he's been playing games daily for nearly twenty years and writing about them for twelve. He tends to gravitate towards the classic genres of his youth: RPGs, action/adventure, shooting.

Casey Loe
Contributing Editor

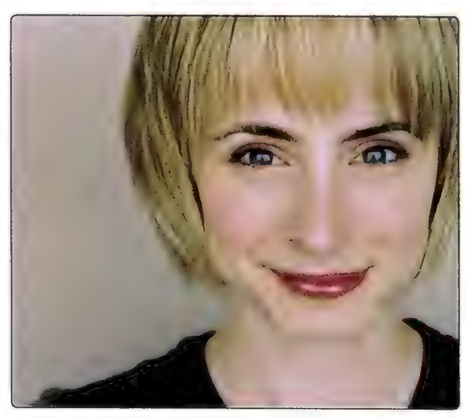
Favorite genres: RPGs, action, humming-bird simulators **Now playing:** Dead Rising **Favorite movie-based game:** Willow **Favorite TV-based game:** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Casey had a promising future as a video game journalist a decade ago, but booze, pills, and his all-consuming hatred of Final Fantasy VIII ultimately left him incomprehensible and unemployable. After spending eight years on the street ranting about Squall Leonhart to winos, schizophrenics, and syphilitic prostitutes, Casey has tricked an old friend into paying him to complain about video games in a national video game magazine.

Eric Patterson
Contributing Editor

Favorite genres: Survival Horror, puzzle, music + Bemani, 2D SNK fighters **Now playing:** Tomb Raider Legend **Favorite movie-based game:** Goldeneye 007 **TV-based game:** WWF Wrestlemania

Eric's reason for over two decades of video gaming is simple: so far, real life has yet to provide him access to zombies, quiet resort towns overrun with demons, ghosts you can trap with a camera, or, you know, a flesh and blood Jill Valentine or Ashley Graham. Mind getting on that, real life?



Heather Campbell
Associate Editor

Favorite genres: Fighting, RPGs, Action, Etc. **Now playing:** FF XII, Godhand **Favorite movie-based game:** Goldeneye 007 **TV-based game:** Star Trek: Legacy

Heather's favorite game would be a hybrid of Street Fighter III and MMORPG level grinding. If someone would craft a title that was endless hours of fighting the same enemies, using classic Capcom button combos, then her death in front of the arcade cabinet would become the stuff of urban legend. Heathers been playing since Aztec Adventure, and still has nightmares about Missile Defence 3-D.

Mike Hobbs
Art Director

Favorite genres: Action, racing, adventure, alternative, shooters **Now playing:** Star Fox Command **Favorite movie-based game:** Alien 3 **TV-based game:** None

A gamer since Space Invaders, Michael has a soft spot for 2D shooters and other games that directly engage the player. Nintendo certainly ranks high on his list of ideal developers. He's also recently become addicted to RC sailplane flying, so you'll actually find him outside now, absorbing the sun's photons.

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Violence
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System(s)	PlayStation 2	Publisher	Bandai Namco Games	Available	Oct. 24
Developer	CyberConnect 2	Online/Multi	NA	ESRB Rating	Teen

.hack//

G.U. vol. 1//Rebirth

Login initiated__your Haseo awaits

words **Dave Halverson**

There are a lot of RPGs out there for the PS2, in fact, it's safe to say that the last couple of years have been among the richest ever for the genre, but there are none quite like .hack//G.U. What started as a novel idea for a simulated MMORPG tied to an anime series has blossomed into one of role-playing's most beloved series, if for no other reason than its individuality. But there is so much more to love with G.U. The jump from the initial series to the current series is on par with many a next-generation overhaul. CyberConnect2 has righted every wrong, completely redesigning the look of the game, and adding functionality where frustration once took hold.

The World's coma engine is alive and well as the second series gets underway, but user Haseo is on the case, delving deep into the underbelly of The World, working with the system's stewards and the friends he meets along the way to unravel what's gone askew, as the player-killer-killer Tri-Edge continues to grow beyond the parameters of the system. Able to use Data Drain and bearing a character design not found in the code, he is the ghost in the system and Haseo will have to go to great lengths corralling this ferocious white rabbit. I've written in depth on the game's battle engine, dungeons, and user interface so I will simply reinstate here that they are all of the utmost quality, coupled with among the best character design this side of Square-Enix's domain, and most importantly a gripping story that grabs a hold of you early on and just squeezes tighter and tighter as the massive first volume unravels. .hack// G.U. is an action-RPG gamer's dream-come-true, encapsulating superb action, beautiful character and world design, excellent pacing and a compelling story all wrapped in a massive cyber-adventure.

It's time to dive back in if you're already a citizen, and if you're not, gain access to the gaming world's most compelling simulated cyber space. **play**

> "CyberConnect2 has righted every wrong, completely redesigning the look of the game, and adding functionality where frustration once took hold."

.hack// G.U. vol. 1//Rebirth score **9.0**

+	Interface and overall structure vastly improved; superb character design, soundtrack and especially story.
−	It's a bit of a slow burn the first 10 hours or so and I have to admit I'd like to see the series jump to PS3 from here, as beautiful as it is.

Character design doesn't get much better than this...

System(s)	PlayStation 2	Publisher	Namco-Bandai	Available	October
Developer	Namco Tales Studio	Online/Multi	NA	ESRB Rating	RP

Tales of the Abyss

A tale worth telling

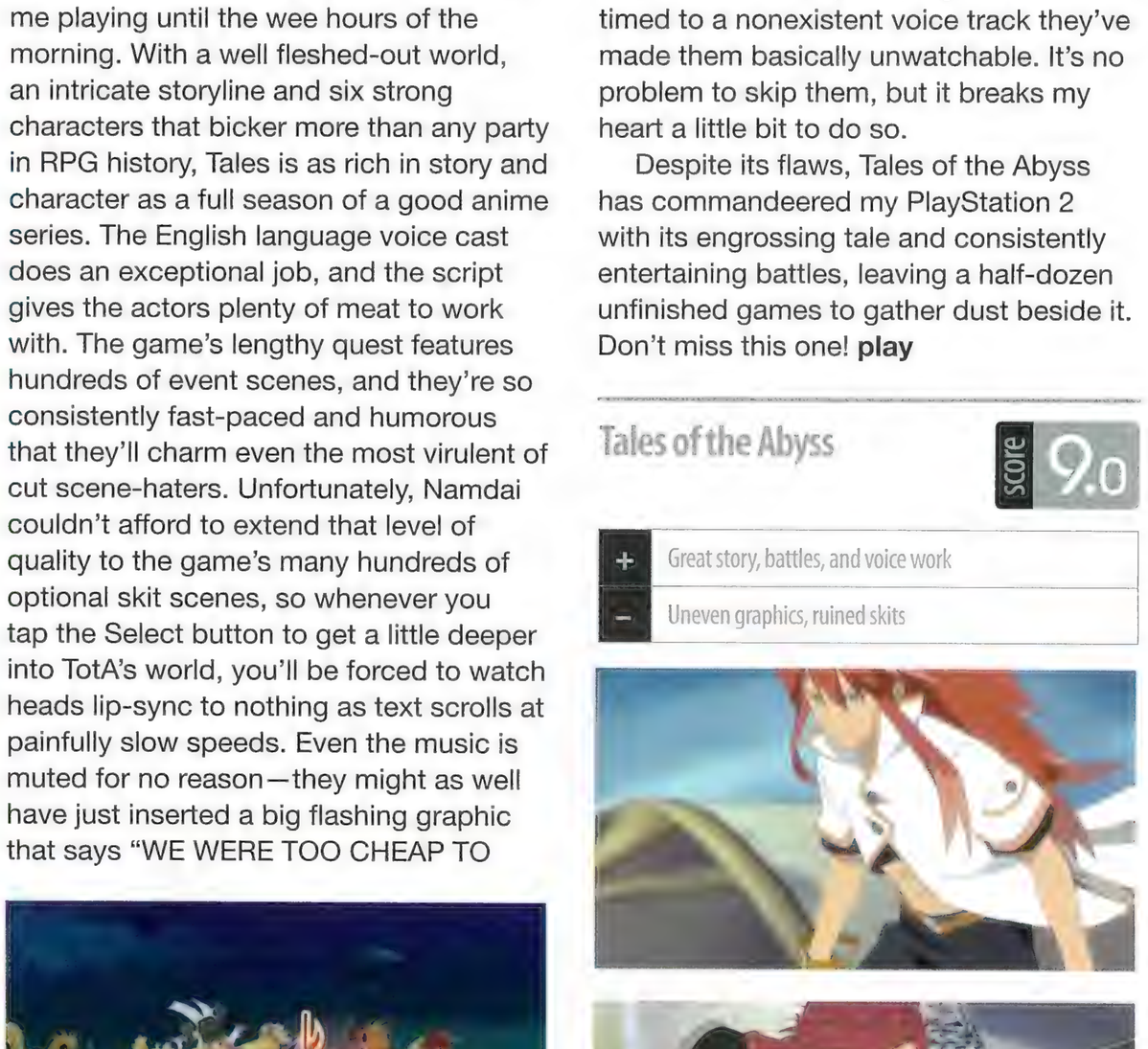
words **Casey Loe**

This has been a great year for RPGs, as last year's trickle has steadily grown into a deluge. I don't think a month of 2006 has gone by without a solid PS2 RPG release, and publishers are packing October and November with great titles to clear their slates before the PS3 and Wii hit. The downside of this unprecedented RPG windfall is that great games are sure to fall through the cracks, and Tales of the Abyss is the one I fear for most. I'm not going to say it's a better game than FFXII (although a part of me wants to), but I will say this: if you pluck one *other* RPG off the rack this year, this little gem should be it.

Tales of the Abyss is not exactly an all-around masterpiece. The game's environments are generally pretty, but the battles look bland and the world map is hideous. The loading times are often longer than the battles themselves, and the game's elaborate menu system is a mess. The music is generally good, but I'm getting a little of sick of Motoi Sakuraba at this point—he scores every third RPG and his style barely varies from series to series; I should not be having Baten Kaitos, Star Ocean and Valkyrie Profile flashbacks as I play a Tales game. Go Shiina did a much better job with the soundtrack to last year's otherwise inferior Tales of Legendia.

I could go on listing flaws, but Tales of the Abyss gets everything right that really matters. Take the battle system—there are a few cool new twists, but the Abyss team has wisely decided to cease tinkering and incorporate every mechanic that has worked in past titles. Inexperienced players can set the game to semi-auto and button-mash their way through, but the new Field of Fonon system and the return of Hi-Ougis, free movement and defensive skills provide plenty of depth for experts to plumb. After years of experimentation, the battles are just about perfect at this point.

> "If you pluck one other RPG off the rack this year, this little gem should be it."



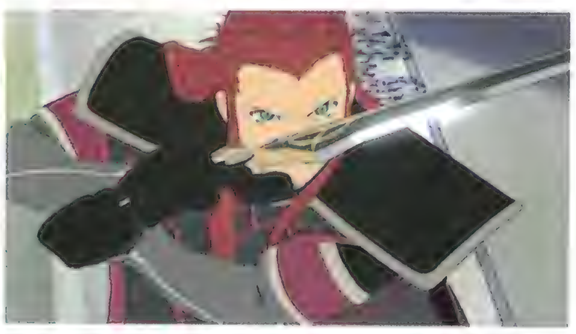
But it isn't the battle system that kept me playing until the wee hours of the morning. With a well fleshed-out world, an intricate storyline and six strong characters that bicker more than any party in RPG history, Tales is as rich in story and character as a full season of a good anime series. The English language voice cast does an exceptional job, and the script gives the actors plenty of meat to work with. The game's lengthy quest features hundreds of event scenes, and they're so consistently fast-paced and humorous that they'll charm even the most virulent of cut scene-haters. Unfortunately, Namdai couldn't afford to extend that level of quality to the game's many hundreds of optional skit scenes, so whenever you tap the Select button to get a little deeper into TotA's world, you'll be forced to watch heads lip-sync to nothing as text scrolls at painfully slow speeds. Even the music is muted for no reason—they might as well have just inserted a big flashing graphic that says "WE WERE TOO CHEAP TO VOICE THIS!" I can understand the need to cut costs, but by keeping the skits timed to a nonexistent voice track they've made them basically unwatchable. It's no problem to skip them, but it breaks my heart a little bit to do so.

Despite its flaws, Tales of the Abyss has commandeered my PlayStation 2 with its engrossing tale and consistently entertaining battles, leaving a half-dozen unfinished games to gather dust beside it. Don't miss this one! **play**

Tales of the Abyss

score **9.0**

+	Great story, battles, and voice work
–	Uneven graphics, ruined skits



A Masterpiece Remastered!

For Game Boy Advance

FINAL FANTASY® V ADVANCE

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Mild Fantasy Violence
Mild Language

ILLUSTRATION © 2006 YOSHITAKA AMANO

An epic story...

Under the benevolent auspices of the elemental crystals -- Wind, Water, Fire and Earth -- mankind enjoyed a golden age of unparalleled harmony.

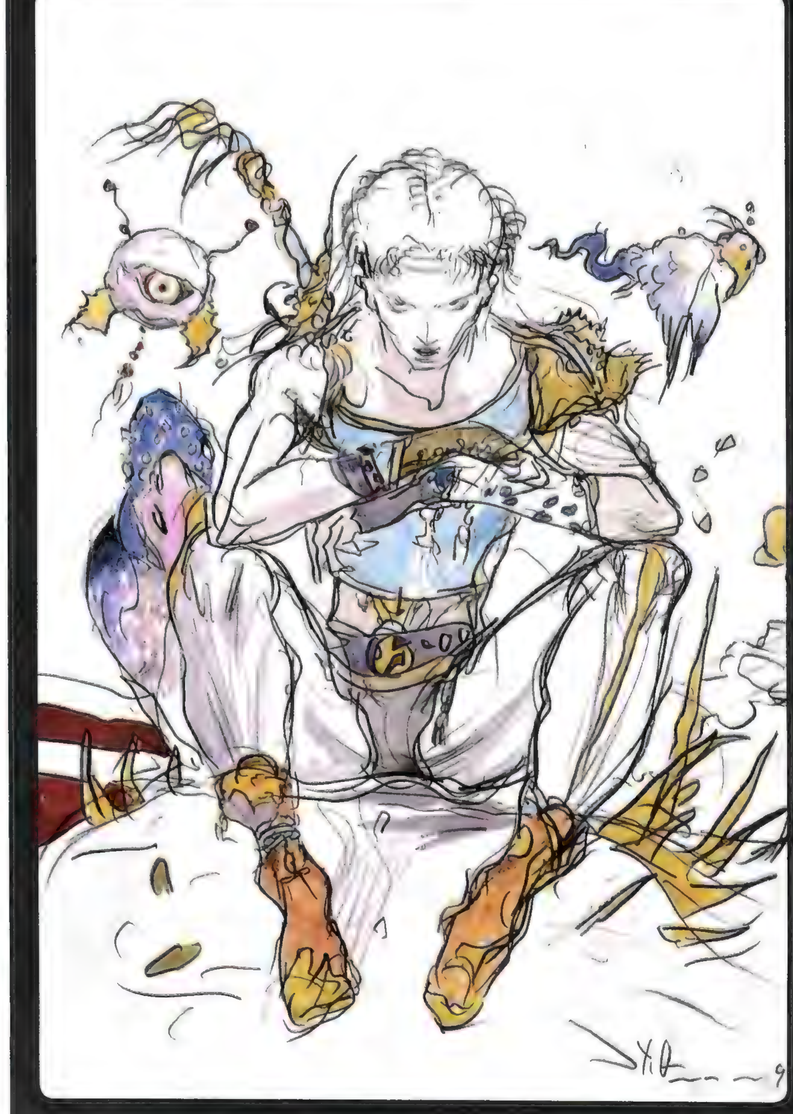
One day, the winds mysteriously cease to blow. Concerned, the king of Tycoon (a prosperous land charged with guarding the wind crystal) flies on the back of his dragon to the holy sanctuary. There, he witnesses the unimaginable: The wind crystal, protector of life from time immemorial, shatters before his very eyes.

Meanwhile, a young adventurer named Bartz, resting with his trusty chocobo steed, Boko, in a forest near Tycoon, is startled when a giant meteor crashes nearby. Heading towards the crash site, he saves the life of a young woman named

An unforgettable cast...

Bartz Klauser

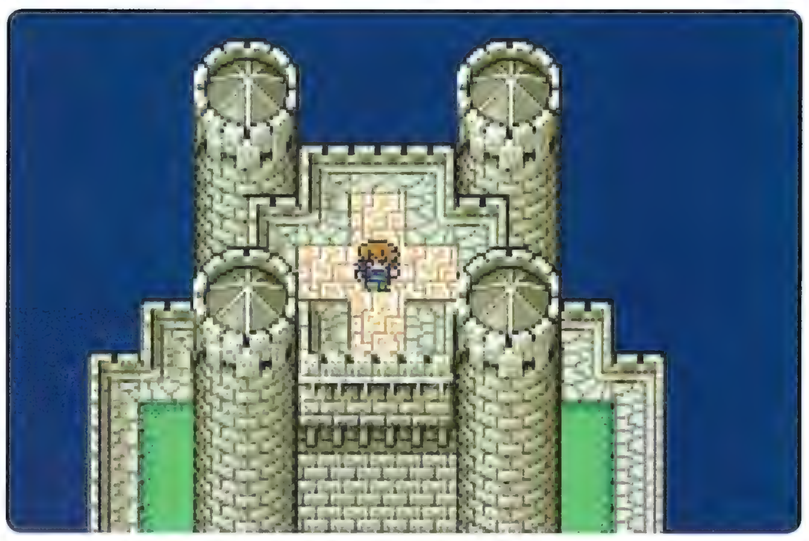
Young and idealistic, Bartz is the quintessential adventurer. Wandering from town to town with his intelligent chocobo steed Boko, Bartz is a true lone wolf, connected to no-one. Initially reluctant to help Lenna and have others depend on him, Bartz will come to learn the meaning of friendship, and the truth about his own mysterious lineage.



Lenna, who explains that she was on her way to the Wind Shrine to check up on her father. The two make their way to the wreckage of the meteor, where they find an old man stricken with amnesia, unable to recall anything but his name: Galuf. With the aid of the pirate captain Faris, Bartz and company eventually reach the Wind Shrine, only to find the crystal chamber littered with shards of the broken crystal and king Tycoon nowhere to be found.

Through a vision of the lost king, the shards speak to the foursome: United by fate, they are entrusted with the crystal's power so they may save the remaining crystals--and the world. Only Bartz, Lenna, Galuf and Faris can stop the destruction before it is too late.

For evil only sleeps, it does not fade away...



A journey like no other...

FINAL FANTASY V Advance represents the final evolution of the job change system, first introduced in Final Fantasy III. Taking command of 26 total jobs, both series mainstays like knight, monk and red mage, and four all-new jobs exclusive to the Game Boy Advance -- gladiator, cannoneer, oracle and necromancer -- players have an unparalleled level of freedom. Unlike recent games in the series, parties can be tailored exactly as the player sees fit. Will you go the traditional route of a balanced party, with equal helpings of warrior and mage? Or will you try for more unorthodox combinations, such as an all-wizard team? The choice is yours, and it's safe to say that no two people will play FINAL FANTASY V Advance exactly alike.

"Unlike recent games in the series, parties can be tailored exactly as the player sees fit."

Couple this with a lengthy, world-spanning quest navigated via chocobo, ship, airship and dragon, and exclusive Game Boy Advance features such as an optional super dungeon and music jukebox, and the choice is clear: It's time to relive the adventure many consider the gameplay high point of the legendary series -- or experience it for the very first time -- right in the palm of your hand.

Lenna Charlotte Tycoon

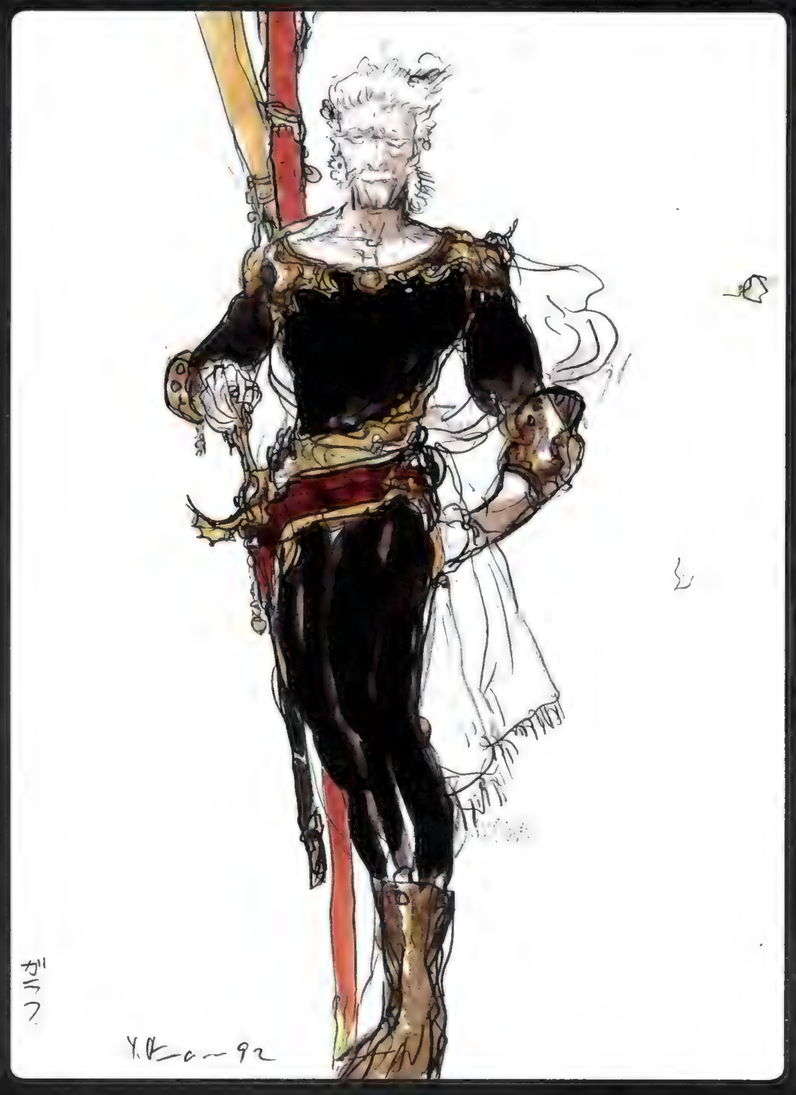
Lenna is the teenaged princess of Tycoon, the country charged with protecting the wind crystal. Beautiful and kind, yet somewhat naïve, Lenna wants nothing more than to discover the mystery of her lost father. She displays a close affinity for dragons, and an almost maternal instinct when it comes to protecting those she perceives as weaker than herself.

Galuf Doe

An old man stricken with amnesia, Galuf is an enigma. Something about his skill with swords and noble bearing suggests a man of high birth, though this often seems to be at odds with his raucous and lighthearted behavior. Having nothing but a vague need to go to the Wind Shrine, he decides to accompany Princess Lenna, both out of concern for the young girl and in the hopes that something along the way might jog his memory.

Faris Scherwiz

Bold and headstrong, Captain Faris commands a pirate crew aboard a curious ship that requires no wind to sail. Despite a young age, Faris is very worldly, yet always ready to help fellow Warriors out...with a little prodding. A pirate virtually since birth, this character can often display a selfish streak, though there is a secret that might threaten Faris' position of leadership should it ever be revealed.



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Final Fantasy XII

It's not that I'm afraid of giving Final Fantasy XII a ten...

words Heather Campbell

System(s)	PS2	Publisher	Square Enix	Available	November
Developer	Square Enix	Online/Multi	NA	ESRB Rating	T

I may never beat Final Fantasy XII. I can't bring myself to do it. I've fallen in love with this game, completely, and don't want the relationship to end. It would break my heart to know that it was over, finally. I'd rather spend thirty more minutes not knowing how it concludes than ever draw my sword against the final boss.

If pixels had gravity, then FFXII would be the dense center of RPG universe. Every corner of this game pulls you towards it; the title is so complete, so lush and rewarding, I nearly tumbled over myself and fell through my screen. Maybe I did; never have I lived in a game such as this one. With more than 100 hours of quest, subquest, sub-dungeon, sub-story available, it's easy to spend more of your waking hours in Ivalice than on Earth.

So much has already been said about this masterpiece that it's hard to know where to begin. Famitsu, the Japanese magazine known for its stingy scoring, has granted FFXII a 40/40; this is only the sixth time in the history of the rag that any game has been given such an honor. Play magazine has also only given four tens in its history, so it is with nervous, deep-set trepidation that I tread towards the final score.

It's not that I'm afraid of giving Final Fantasy XII a ten. It's just overwhelming to have played perfection. And that's what this game is; extraordinary to the point of awe. I'm confused by how good it is. I can think of nothing to change, no complaint to level. The world design, the costume design, the character design, and the gameplay design all coalesce into something flawless.

I've put so many hours into it, but I'm an obsessive-compulsive RPG player. I have to investigate every edge of the world, stare at every NPC, ingest every detail of a dusty archway, a sunsoaked tile floor, a chattering moogle. And FF12 has been delayed for two years, developed for four, which means that every detail is detailed. There are no cut corners in this game, and exploring it with any passion is like walking into an antique store filled with every relic a civilization ever produced.

Now, Final Fantasy XII comes at the end of the PS2's life. With all of the

"So much has already been said about this masterpiece that it's hard to know where to begin."

"For the first time in my life of gaming, I really feel like I've gone on an adventure."

roaring hype about next gen systems, I feel almost maternal worry that the game will be overlooked. I'm concerned Final Fantasy has become passé. The age of RPGs came and went in the mid-late-nineties; how can we drum up support for a game so delayed, postponed, so oft rumored problematic?

The best I can do is tell you how this game makes me feel, and hope that it affects you in the same way.

Final Fantasy XII is the first mature game I've ever played. Whether it be the wisdom of its story, language, or of actual gameplay, it's hard to imagine playing another RPG after this. It's long, and it's fast. Taking elements of MMO design and incorporating them into an offline experience, FFXII streamlines the cluttered, turn-based battles of former FF titles. RPGs are great because of their stories, and FFXII panthers from moment to moment relentlessly.

Using a system of "Gambits," players pre-program basic AI routines for the party, and then steer the group into battle. It's essentially pre-committing to how you've always behaved in Final Fantasy games. Instead of waiting for a character's HP to drop to half, you tell a party member, "If this happens, cast Cure." It's what you would have done anyway, and if Final Fantasy XII can be guilty of anything, it's making us conscious of how repetitive Active Time Battling really was.

Unlocking your abilities takes place via the License Board. Each character receives License Points from fighting, and then these points are spent on this essentially updated Sphere Grid. The freedom is a little disorienting; any character can become a White Mage, a Thief, a Warrior. With so much time to spend in the game, every character can become a master of everything.

But what are you spending time doing? There's the obvious (yet subtly delivered) main story, but one can also engage Clan Hunts — the main sidequest of FFXII. By checking Clan boards throughout the world, you can unlock and engage a specific creature. Essentially a system of Notorious Monsters (another idea cribbed from the world of MMOs), this is the first Final Fantasy mini-game that is right there, in the world, with you. You don't have to play cards, or race chocobos, or stop playing the actual plot. Running into a Hunt target can happen as you go about engaging the major quests of the game. In this way, the Clan system feels more deeply integrated into the story than any other mini-game before.

I don't even know how to encapsulate the experience of FFXII into two pages. The title is so grand, so erudite, that I feel illiterate by comparison. It is so much greater than I. For the first time in my life of gaming, I really feel like I've gone on an adventure.

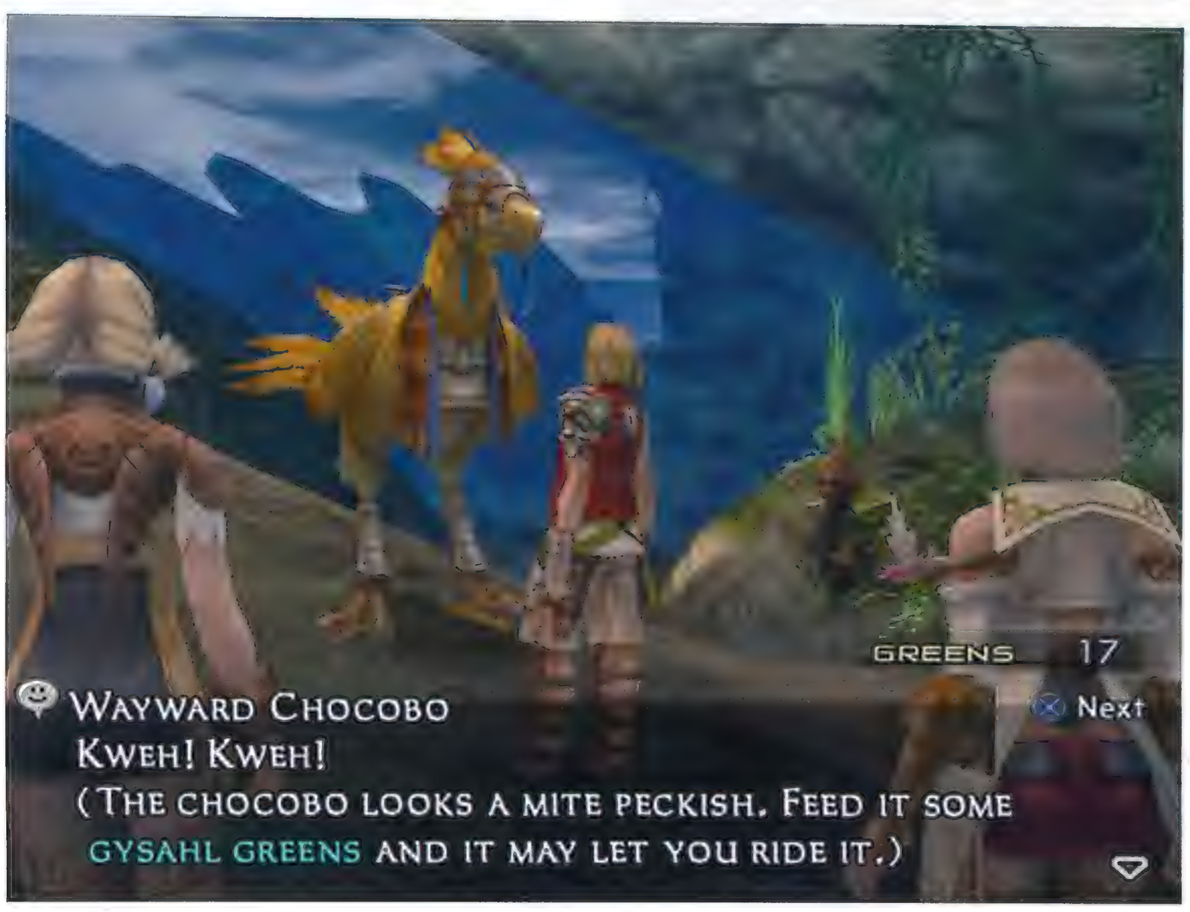
And I'll add this: I'm embarrassed to love other Final Fantasy games. They seem so childish now, the plotlines straightforward and sophomoric. How can I invoke an unsoiled memory of Squall or Cloud when Basch is a thousand times the man they were? What Time Kompression or Midgar Plate or Sin can hold a candle to the narrative restraint of the story of Dalmasca? What other Final Fantasy game has begged, "Don't finish me yet; I don't want you to leave."

For now, I'll simply head back into Ivalice, and spend a few more hours trying to take in every detail of every shop, stall, texture and sound. I'll try and read every word of text written for the game; I'll devour every last piece of Yasumi Matsuno's masterpiece. It's the least I can do in the face of a game so great. **play**

Final Fantasy XII

score 10

+	This makes all other RPGs look stale.
–	This makes all other RPGs look stale.



System(s)	PlayStation 2	Publisher	Tecmo	Available	October 2006
Developer	Tecmo	Online/Multi	1	ESRB Rating	E

Tokobot Plus
Mysteries of the Karakuri

More fun than a barrel of robo-monkeys.

words **Eric L. Patterson**

What young lad wouldn't love to have an army of robots under his command? That's exactly what plucky treasure hunter Bolt has at his disposal, thanks to discovering the Tokobots, a group of strange little robots that have a mysterious connection to an ancient civilization. Bolt simply wants to prove his worth to the research lab he works for, but fate has other plans for the boy, as he soon finds himself in the middle of a sinister plot to control the world via long lost technology.

When Tokobot first hit the PSP, it stood proud as a refreshingly original title, something said hardware was in need of at the time. The basic premise was old-school platforming, but the various ways in which Bolt could make use of his robot pals added that extra level of personality and gameplay that makes a good game great. Commands can be given to the Karakuri (the name by which the Tokobots were originally known), and the various actions they can perform via those commands are what helps you, and Bolt, overcome the game's many obstacles. At first, these abilities start off simple: linking together to form a ladder for Bolt to climb up, or swinging around to knock over an oncoming enemy, for example. As you progress deeper into the game, Bolt will uncover additional upgrades for his Tokobots, such as the ability to join them together to form a variety of machines and weapons.

It's all about teamwork.

Tokobots alone won't get you through this game, however; your skills will be tested as you make precision jumps, find an enemy's weakness, or figure out how in the world to get to that door that you know you have to get to. You'll fail, and you'll die–a lot–but as a wise (fictional) man once said, we fall so that we can learn to pick ourselves back up. Progress is never just handed to you, so when you do things just right and finally get past that particularly tricky area, you'll feel like you've actually accomplished something afterward.

> "What young lad wouldn't want to have an army of robots under his command?"

Though most of the game's difficulty is wonderfully balanced, boss battles are creative, enjoyable, yet heartbreakingly easy, while the random "lock you in a room with a slew of common monsters" challenges are difficult, frustrating, and far more pain than fun.

For its grand re-introduction on the PS2, Tecmo has gone back and either tweaked or added to nearly all of the game's elements. Probably the biggest changes are to the camera and controls, both of which have received welcome modifications. The new method for commanding your Tokobots to perform their Joint Actions is top notch, but the camera system, while much improved, still has its problems. Among the other additions, new areas have been scattered throughout the game, offering extra challenges and treasures to be won, the story-line has been fleshed out and backed by full voice acting, and stages can now be replayed and run through in time attack without the need for beating the game first. What this means is a better, more developed version of an already great game for those new to Tokobot, and another reason to play through the game for longtime fans. **play**

Tokobot Plus: Mysteries of the Karakuri

score **9.0**

+	Easy to pick up, hard to put down.
–	Boss fights fun, but over too soon.

System(s)	PC, GC, PS2, Xbox	Publisher	THQ	Available	October
Developer	THQ Australia Studios	Online/Multi	NA	ESRB Rating	E 10+

Avatar
The Last Airbender
Aang and company grab some big air in their game debut

words Dave Halverson

Sokka, Katara, and Aang lay the mushi down.

It's obvious from the get-go that Avatar's designed explicitly to serve its youth demographic. It's a prime example of the modern brand-endemic video game, focus-tested to death and then some. Whether you hold that against it or not is an individual decision. If you cringe at the thought of replaying areas or facing indecision of any kind, and/or are an Avatar fan—well, then this game is for you. It is impossible to get lost in Avatar or not know exactly what to do. You get a journal complete with an onscreen icon which can only be cleared by accessing it, a big green arrow pointing the way to each and every quest no matter how significant, and saves literally every 3-5 minutes (that take seconds on Xbox but slow things down on PS2). There is no guess work involved. There is however a massive top-down action/RPG to be had that takes a while to build steam (the scope of the game doesn't come into view until you reach the city of Omashu where King Bumi will more than entertain you) but is hard to put down once you get into the depths of the adventure.

For those new to the series, the "Avatar" is a mischievous 12-year-old boy named Aang, defrosted by siblings Katara and Sokka 100 years after the old Avatar disappeared, leaving the nations of Fire, Earth, Water, and Air vulnerable to the Fire Nation, whose path of destruction can only be stopped by the Avatar. You can figure out the rest.

Simply put the game is a massive quest-based adventure that sends Aang and party on mission after mission, via a laundry list of errands (boosting precious EXP) placed within each overall event integral to progressing the story. Connected by a vast network of lands awash with arteries, the action consists of running and fighting, using steadily entertaining bouts of stealth, and defeating bosses…but there's a lot of meat on these bones.

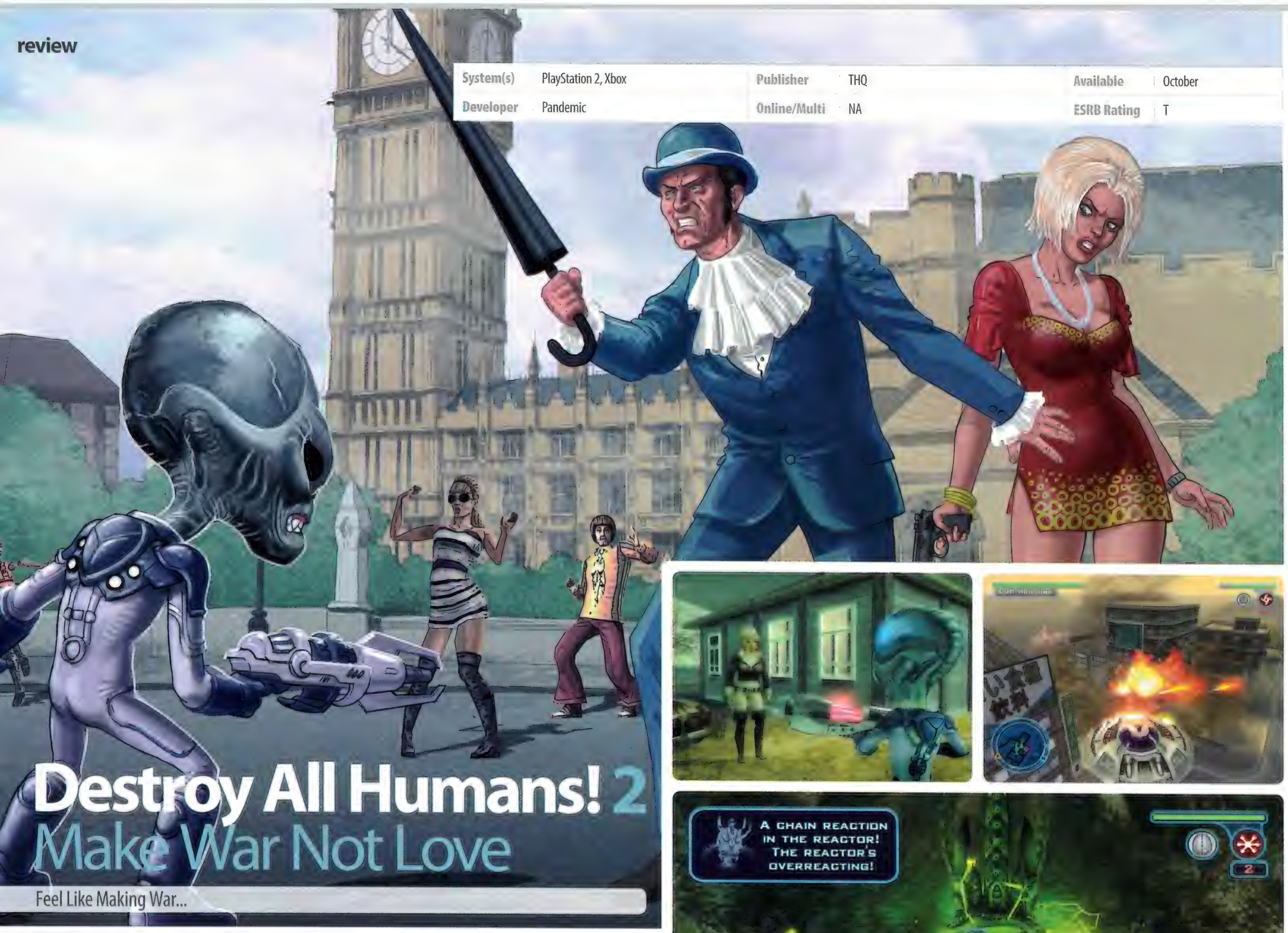
For one thing—and I'm so happy to see this—the party members all appear together, rather than blending into one body only to disperse for each battle (there's a sequence when you rescue a bear and even it travels with you) providing a real sense of the camaraderie. There is also a lot to do in terms of trade, item management, leveling up moves—divided between offensive, defensive, and distraction—and an array of character-endemic Focus events where a spherical grid is used to summon powers to find buried treasure, heal, solve topographical obstacles and so forth. Momo and Appa get into the act too.

> "For one thing—and I'm so happy to see this—the party members all appear together"

Visually, while not exactly arresting, the terrain is vivid and displays nice detail, the cel-shading is exceptional, and the in-game cinemas are as attractive as they are well acted. The animation is nimble too—characters are rubbery and light of foot—although battles tend to lack crisp collision, and, unfortunately, no jumping. But hey, who's complaining right? Anime and animation-based games are 99% fighting. I'm just happy to see someone make a real go of it. **play**

Avatar: the Last Airbender — score **7.5**

+	Lots to do, zero frustration, exceptional voice acting and cel-shading, loads of tactics, and some memorable bosses.
−	A little soft on the battle collision, extremely linear, frequent saving bogs down the PS2 version



Destroy All Humans! 2
Make War Not Love

Feel Like Making War...

System(s)	PlayStation 2, Xbox	Publisher	THQ	Available	October
Developer	Pandemic	Online/Multi	NA	ESRB Rating	T

words **Greg Orlando**

As Destroy All Humans! 2: Make War Not Love's title suggests, you won't be giving the various shaven apes here any presents unless, of course, it's the searing kiss of a disintegrator blast or the liberating touch of the anal probe. As the alien Cryptosporidium-138 and his various clones, it's your job to fry the hippies, blow up the buildings, and make mischief in a 1960s setting. Take that, Age of Aquarius.

Love picks up some 10 years after the events of Destroy All Humans!, with the vile Soviets attempting to take over the world. The protagonist Crypto begins in a faux San Francisco—called Bay City—targeted by the Reds for a hostile takeover via a strange, new drug. Missions have the snarky alien (who sounds remarkably like a nearly talented Jack Nicholson impersonator) hunting down the makers of Revelade, both on foot and in a flying saucer.

There's a great sense of mayhem and chaos here, with Crypto able to wreak havoc on both his surroundings and the general populace with his mental abilities, as well as a set of extraterrestrial weapons. It's possible to possess humans, scan their brains for information, hit them with pure waves of free love, toss around bodies and inanimate objects with telekinesis, and transmogrify junk in order to create ammunition for alien weaponry.

While flying, Crypto can abduct humans to feed into a genetic gene blender to enhance his abilities, engage a cloaking device to fly around undetected, and use gravity beams and death rays to tear up air- and ground-based targets. He is, in short, a diminutive arsenal, a wrecking ball with bug eyes.

The sheer breadth and scope of Crypto's destructive capabilities allow for extended sequences of freeform violence and mayhem. The game succeeds thoroughly when it puts its protagonist on a destructive path, asking the alien to tear through humanity in the manner of a chainsaw through human flesh. The game finds its rhythm when Crypto's made to soar through the skies in his spaceship, blasting endless tanks in an all-out defense of Bay City's Coit Tower, and during a romp through England's streets where alien and Soviet Spy slaughter KGB men aplenty.

"Flower power takes it on the chin here..."

Wondrous cathartic violence is supplemented with humor that's more funny than genuinely wince inducing. At times, Crypto will interrupt someone's long-winded commentary to note that right at this moment, the player is in the kitchen making nachos. When a villain, in his death throes, begins monologuing, Crypto will be there to plant his gun on the ground and lean sleepily on it.

Unfortunately, the game embraces some poor design choices. Multi-part missions are potholed by the lack of checkpoints, meaning that if Crypto gets killed, he has to start over from the beginning. This is problematic because Love has no compunctions about presenting you with an extended run-and-gun sequence, followed by an escort mission where it's necessary to take to the skies to clear a path for a woman in a car—a woman who is incapable of driving around obstacles on a partially blocked street.

Flower power takes it on the chin here, and Love is agreeable enough to put it down for the count. And the mayhem here should be enough until Crypto turns his guns on bell-bottoms, disco, and Jimmy Carter. Watch the skies. **play**

Destroy All Humans! 2 Make War Not Love — score **8.0**

+	Emphasis on cathartic, amoral destruction; game has a good sense of humor
-	Poor game design; horrible escort missions

Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2

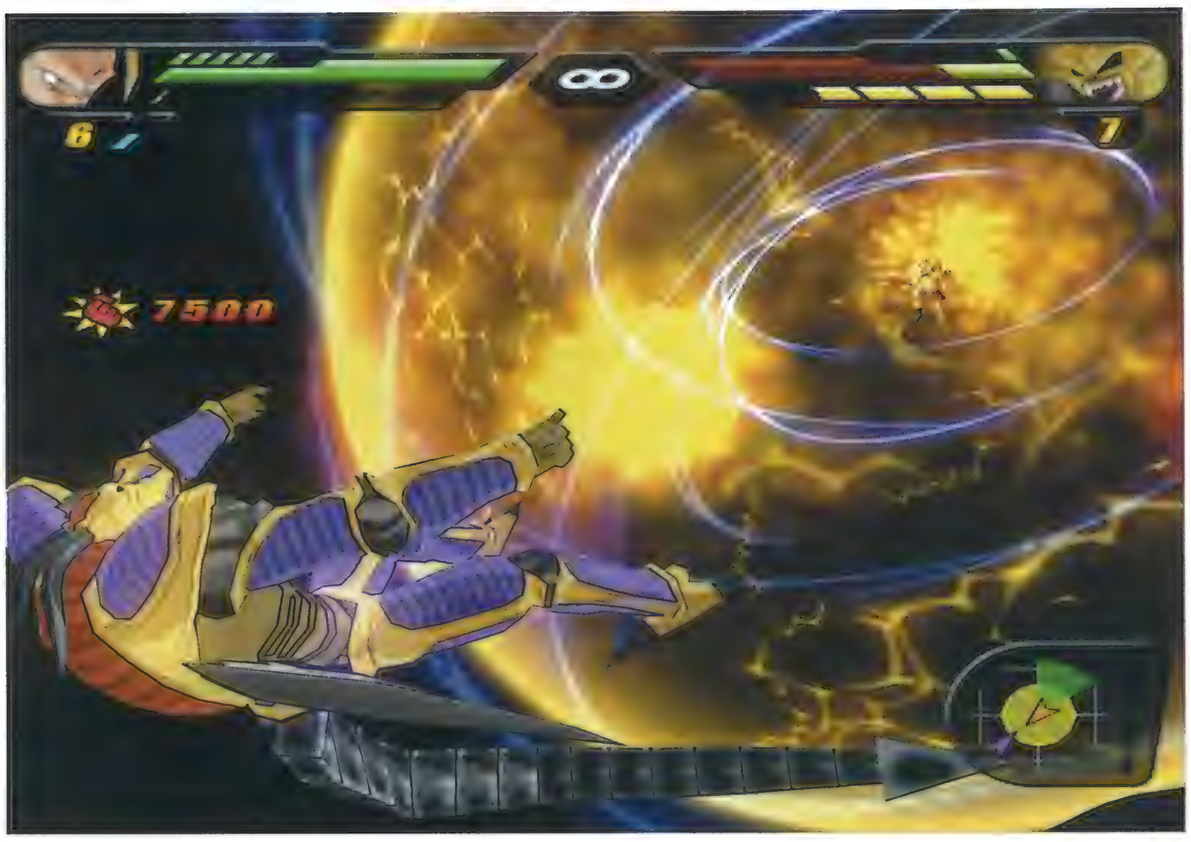
score 8.0

Come get some

System	PlayStation 2	Online/Multi	1-2
Developer	Spike	Available	November 7
Publisher	Atari/Namco Bandai	ESRB Rating	Teen

Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 is the type of game that will only give you back what you're willing to put into it. Until you've spent some quality time with the game's training mode, the fighting engine will seem shallow and/or confusing, and your A.I.-controlled opponents will pummel you with such ease that you'll question if your controller is actually plugged in. Put in some real effort, however, and you'll be duly rewarded.

I'm reminded here of the good old days with Asuka 120% on the Saturn: it wasn't fancy, it wasn't overly technical, what it was was a chance for you and a friend to "bang" (as we say around these parts) in crazy, back and forth, non-stop matches of epic proportion. In fact, if you get two people who really know what they're doing, as the characters brawl, teleport around, fire off a "kamehameha" or two, and send each other flying into the distant landscape, you'll swear that you're watching a scene straight from the TV show. Don't let that fool you, though; while you may think otherwise, this is a fighting game that all can enjoy, not just those who live and breathe the adventures of Goku and pals. **Eric Patterson**



"I'm reminded here of the good old days with Asuka 120% on the Saturn..."

God Hand

score 8.5

Power of the divine

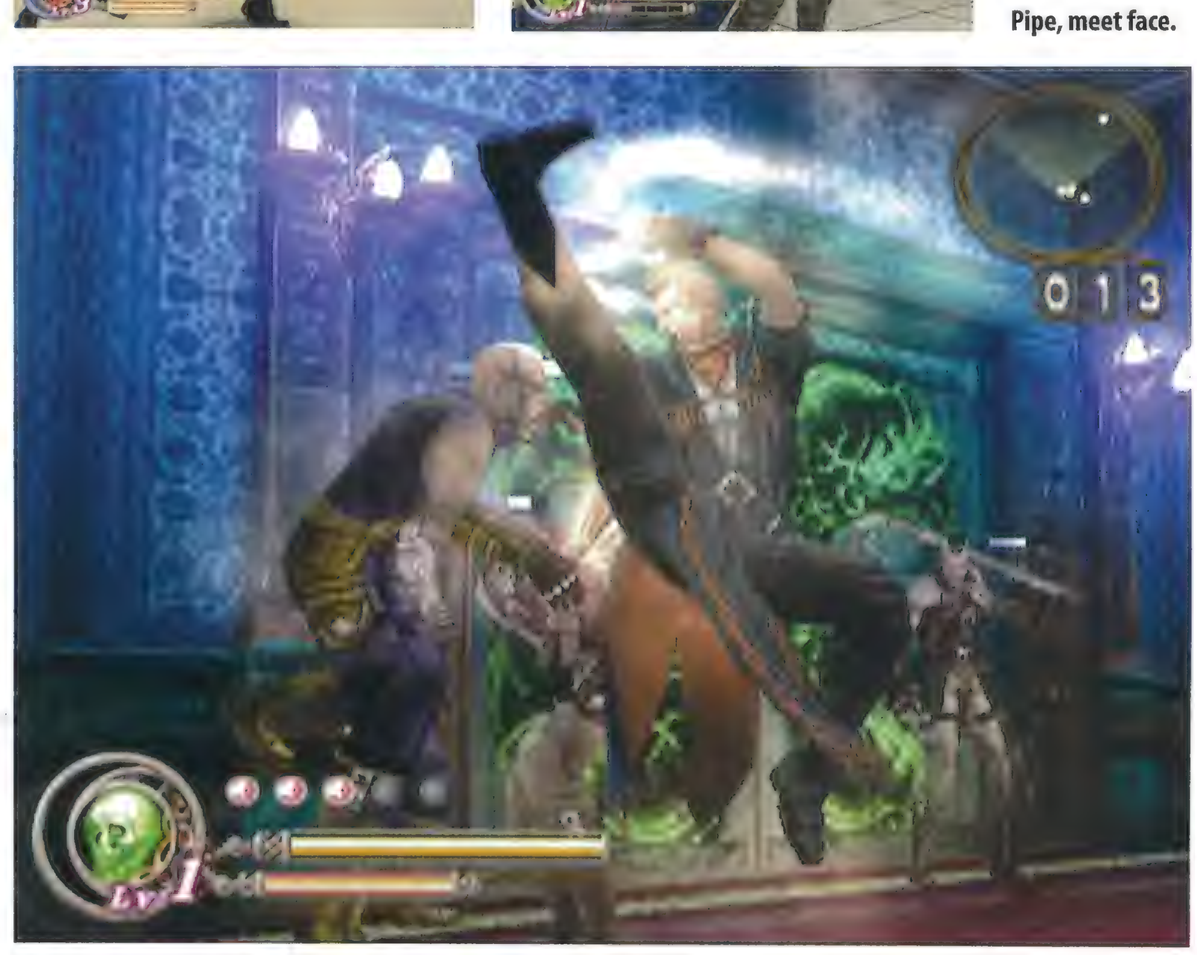
System(s)	PlayStation 2	Multi	NA
Developer	Clover Studios	Available	October 10
Publisher	Capcom	ESRB Rating	Mature

Pipe, meet face.

Remember Streets of Rage? Remember Battletoads and Double Dragon? Remember hanging out with your buddies and trading off controllers, eating chips, and pressing pause on your NES until after dinner? God Hand is gonna bring it all back. Under the guidance of Shinji Mikami (Resident Evil, Devil May Cry, Viewtiful Joe), Clover Studios has developed a brawler so rich with homage that it feels like Tarantino. This is the game we've been waiting for. It's an over-the top beat 'em up; it's The Bouncer with some balls.

Do you care about the story? Well, here it is. Jean had his arm lopped off by some really large gentlemen. So, Jean replaces his lost arm with a supernatural one. Jean then sets out to kick ass.

God Hand's combat is a three-tiered system. You have more than one-hundred basic techniques, which you pre-program into a string of personal combos; a set of "Roulette" moves, which are extraordinarily powerful special techniques – think kicking a guy into space, or pitching a flaming baseball at a group of enemies; and the God Hand gauge, which allows you to pull of endless combos at a sickening speed. Every move is so aggressive that fighting becomes funny; programming your techniques is like setting up your own jokes. God Hand is awesome. **Heather Campbell**



The Godfather

Respect

score 7.0

System	Xbox 360	Online/Multi	NA
Developer	EA	Available	September
Publisher	EA	ESRB Rating	M

It's tempting to rip into the idea of classics in cinema—and there are few movies finer than *The Godfather*—finding new form as a video game. But like anything else, if there's respect and understanding for the source material, the transformation to a different medium can yield magic. The Godfather, the game, is not magic.

But let's not get too harsh here. The Godfather is clearly as inspired by Grand Theft Auto as Coppola's original masterpiece, hitting some high marks as it attempts to bring more to this open world of crime and grit. The world is nicely rendered, lending a tone that true fans of the movie can appreciate, and anyone wanting to play the part of a powerful mobster family can get their gaming kicks out of. The city is alive with the energy of the time, filled with sights and sounds that compliment the fiction with a breath of reality. If this isn't entirely next-gen, it's what we've become accustomed to in ports.

There's nothing about The Godfather that is especially effective; it just plays well enough and carries enough fun ideas to work as a satisfying experience. If there is one major area missing that could have made it much more, it's the tepid treatment of the characters from the film. Carrying the same dramatic weight of the movie is no easy task, and the game just leaves you wishing for the impact the source material does indeed demand. **BF**

Naruto Clash of Ninja 2

Believe it! Or not

score 7.0

System(s)	GameCube	Multi	4-player
Developer	Eighting	Available	September 26
Publisher	D3 Publisher	ESRB Rating	T

What Clash of Ninja 2 lacks in the graphics and innovation departments it seeks to make amends for in the fandom zone, inviting Tajutsu devotees to try their hand in multiple modes by including 4-player battles, survival and time-attack, spanning 23 endemic characters for one deep 3D fighter. But is it enough to fuel this GC exclusive at the system's twilight? That depends: While I like CoN2 just fine, there are better games to be had such as Uzumaki Chronicles and D3's own Ninja Council 2. Plus these cel-shaded fighters just don't get it done for me anymore. There are just so many cell-shaded anime based fighters already out there. Then again, if you don't own any yet (and you call yourself a fan) than CoN 2 is new to you so, proceed! It's an anime gamer's paradise for sure, jam packed with all of Jutsu-charged 3D brawling the series is famous for. The 4-player option is also a huge Naruto fan magnet. Beat down fun for the whole family. **Dave Halverson**

Naruto ponders why Sensei is always wearing a jacket.

"It's an anime gamer's paradise for sure, jam packed with all of Jutsu-charged 3D brawling the series is famous for."

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Imagining Worlds

One brush stroke at a time...

words **Brady Fiechter**

They're in cages and just freaking the f*** out, people are going and buying these things. It's horrifying; this one monkey just grabbed me and looked me in the eye," recalls concept artist Jake Kazdal, whose run-in with the monkeys in Japan came during his exclusive work with Tetsuya Mizuguchi (Lumines, Sega Rally) on Space Channel 5, Rez and "an amazing character-based action game that was canceled on Gamecube." Now with EALA, Kazdal talks about his passions as an artist who visualizes the gamespaces you eventually get to live in.

play: So talk to me about concept art and it's meaning to game design.
Jake Kazdal: It's about the visual structure of everything. Designing what the world looks like, what the rules are, how the lighting is going to work, what kind of shapes, what kind of colors, what kind of mood you're going for. You're thinking about the kind of emotion you want the player to feel when they're moving through a virtual space.

That's a big deal.
It's a *huge* deal. It's why it's so much fun doing what I do. I'm just so into it. I love watching movies and I love experiencing things, I love traveling and going to weird places. And my favorite games, I want to feel like I'm in that world.

Your favorite game.
Halo is the best game every made. Halo 1, mind you. That was a world: you felt the rules and you lived there. It was just brilliant.

When you're faced with an idea, what are you drawing off?
I'm just a huge video game nut as much as a concept artist. So I've got a cool position where I get to do a lot of game design on the front end and morph that into what it's going to look like later. We start from the script, what the story is supposed to be at that point, what story beats you want to hit. What do you want to present to the player at that point. What mental state is the player in, how familiar is he with the game system. I use a lot of photos, look at the internet a lot, read a ton of books. I'm always looking for weird ideas. I'll get ideas from something that doesn't look anything like what I might be working on, but I see how it's built or how it's put together, and I get a whole other idea that will work. It's hard to explain. Something can just set me off. I'll look at a caterpillar and I'll think of a robot and I'll go, "Oh dude, I could use those bits for something." I'll just feel something. It's hard, you have to catalog all these emotions you experience in daily life.

It's easy to simplify what you do as just drawing a picture.
I'm just so into it. There are ways to constantly push things forward. I take so many things into account it's just hard to describe the details that finally go into the image.

You worked with Tetsuya Mizuguchi, creator of hugely respected games like Rez Panzer Dragoon Saga, for quite a while in Japan. How did you get involved?
I read a big article about him, a huge biography on him. I was doing production 3D art and animation at the time for Boss Studios up in Seattle, and I knew all about him. What music he liked, what games he liked, I was just a big fan. I played Sega Rally like crazy when I was in college. It was a real laugh that I ended up working with the guys who did the Saturn port of Sega Rally. And I loved Panzer Dragoon, those were my other teammates for the Rez project. It was crazy, cuz I'm just a complete fanboy. But anyway, I had a chance to meet Mizuguchi at E3 98, and I knew at the time that the resume process is like a full-on written resume with pictures and stuff on it, like a passport picture. I had a Japanese friend translate for me, and I went through the whole process of preparing my resume before I met him. It turns out he we crafting a new team at the time, so he contacted me, we hit it off and had a great time. I showed him my demo reels, and he watched it a couple of times and things kind of went from there. We met a second time, drank through the night and discovered that we shared very similar influences and desires for making games. Six months later, I was working in Japan.

Is the process fairly similar there in Japan to you experiences on American projects?
Yeah, the process is pretty much the same. In Japan, they have a really good training system, the sempai system, where you work under somebody and you just train and train and train. Once you get into a job there, you're expected to be locked in for a long time.

Tastes there are obviously different.
It's funny, I introduced some of the Japanese guys to Halo, that free-form sort of gameplay wasn't really available at the time in Japan. Once those guys figured it out, they all snapped. They just loved it.

"I'll get ideas from something that doesn't look anything like what I might be working on."

~Jake Kazdal, artist

I find it interesting they don't tackle the first-person genre more.
Yeah, I don't know. I don't think there's the same market in Japan, and they always think of themselves. It's a strong gaming culture, that's what they know. That's why it was cool to work with Mizuguchi, he was trying to broaden that aspect a bit. Having an American on the team all the sudden it's a very different view. They would ask me, "How will Americans view this, what do you think about this?" We had some really different opinions on the character designs. I was helping to design Ulala from Space Channel 5, and the one I was doing was a lot more sultry and sexy, a little more hardcore. And they were more, "No, no, she's gotta be cute, cute cute cute." So I got these big wicked eyebrows and big wicked lips. She was hot as hell, but she was kind of different from what the Japanese aesthetic likes. But I learned a lot that way working back and forth with the art director, bringing it back down to where both the Japanese and Americans will like it. It was a phenomenal experience.

Living in Japan must have been a trip.
I'm a natural-born tripper. I love weird, trippy experiences. Every day there was something. Exhausting, but never boring...

As an artist, what game has impressed you the most in the past five years?
Psychonauts. The artists there are just so good. Running around that camp at night, meeting f*****g floating bears, f*****g invisible pumas that throw fire at you, just that little playhouse with the cowboy running on the TV set. That is a world, it exists somewhere. It's off the hook. You don't often get games like this.

How did you get interested in drawing?
My mom was an artist. I used to enter my crayon scribbles when I was really young, and I'd always get the blue ribbons. I just dug it. I would always doodle as a child. I remember buying Rebel Assault, and I had the box in my car, and I just noticed this wireframe mesh of this Stormtrooper. This was before real-time 3D at all. I could just see you could take this simple geometry, apply some textures to it, and have a believable 3D environment. That was it. I could see it was coming, and I knew it's what I wanted to do.

And now here we are. Despite all the questions right now, there are some great games out there.
There are just too many, and they're all too long. My whole campaign is for shorter games.

I totally agree.
I want a killer 5-10 hour experience.

I think there is a bigger audience that just doesn't have the time, but they absolutely want to play games.
I have this conversation every day with people at work. We all love video games, but no one has time to play them. We aren't seniors in high school any more, we don't have three months of summer vacation. I will finish a game that is seven hours, you don't have to pad it with filler like so much that's out there.

And then maybe be motivated to play it again.
I want to play Mass Effect so badly you just don't want to know, but I'm terrified to get into it. I don't want to start and not finish it.

With so much art and detail now getting packed into worlds, and hearing you talk about the process... just how big of a deal is what you do in the next-gen way of designing?
When I left Sega in 2003 I didn't know what a concept artist was. I didn't even know there could be such a thing. You did your own concept art, basically. You'd get it approved. But I like only doing the fun part; I didn't realize you could do that until much later, now I couldn't be happier. But yeah, we're to a point where you just need a full-time professional designer. You can't just randomly make shit.

You create the shape of the world to come.
Yeah, most of the top guys I know have industrial design backgrounds. We're designers by trade. We learn the process and theory of design and we apply it to the entertainment medium. I could make cups, I could make tape players.

So you're storyboarding in a sense, right?
Yeah, that's what I do. I read a designer's scripts, and I make the visuals, and we take it from there. We talk about it, we go over it, we review, we might take it into a really early version of 3D.

How do you judge your own work?
You know, I like to look at other people I like. I love the guys at Ubisoft Montreal. That stuff is just so f******g good. It's so beautiful and yet it's so informative. They do such a good job of communicating the space and the feeling and the mood and the shape of things. I look at a lot of movie books, stuff like that. I try and identify what people are doing right and what I might be doing wrong. And of course there's a lot of talent within our studio. It's good to constantly get feedback from other top artists internally.

If I asked you to do a drawing for me and I wanted something for a horror game, it's not just, "Ok, draw a haunted house."
It's not just a house. Ideally, you work very closely with the design team and know what they're trying to achieve. So when you understand the moment of gameplay, you're better able to illustrate what you want the player to feel. What is this world all about? Are we under pressure, are we relaxed, is it beautiful or harsh, is it barren, what are the emotions? Ideally, with one image, you can design a whole level. You can define a world in one painting. That's like the ultimate god complex that's realizable. You're able to illustrated this thing and have it go into this world, and all the sudden you've got a million people running through this painting. **play**

Original photo · shop painting, work in progress...

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Developer	Piranha Bytes	Publisher	Aspyr Media
Online/Multi	none	Available	October

GOTHIC 3

Lose yourself in a land of choice

Preview

Dear Oblivion fans: Gothic 3 might be your next big fix. The third game in the series that pioneered this style of open world action RPG, Gothic 3 leaves the off-shore island of Khorinis and explores Myrtana, the massive mainland. With five times the geography of its predecessors and comprehensively next-gen engine, it contains a fifty hour main quest and over five hundred side quests. Or you may wander a completely seamless landscape, experimenting with the game's omnipresent AI and world simulation. This seemingly colossal production is the three and a half year project of small German studio Piranha Bytes. We spoke to producer Blaine Christine of Aspyr Media about Gothic 3's late-development status.

Interview
Blaine Christine, producer, Aspyr Media

words **Mike Griffin**

play: Gothic 3's release is just around the corner. How is the combat system progressing and how has it evolved?

Blaine: Since we are very close to the end of the development process, I'm happy to report that the combat is in fantastic shape; it's a definite highlight of this game. The most important thing to Aspyr and Piranha Bytes was making sure that players' concerns with the combat in Gothic 2 were addressed in a meaningful way. In Gothic 3, the combat is infinitely more fluid and enjoyable due to the new soft-lock targeting system and an all new animation system that makes hand-to-hand combat look incredibly realistic. Another fantastic addition to the combat this time around is the implementation of physics for the bow and arrow. You can quickly make an Orc into a hedgehog because you see the arrows stick—and stay—wherever you shoot them.

What kind of effect do the RPG elements have on combat and special abilities?

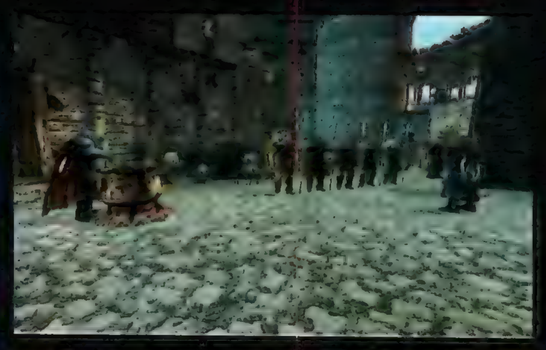
The RPG elements have a dramatic impact on combat and player abilities. Each time you level up, you gain ten learning points that can be spent with trainers that you encounter in the game world. These points can be spent any way the player wants: if you want to spend all of your points upgrading Strength, you can do that; if you want to spend all of your points to become a master of magic, that's okay too. Or you can divide your points between other attributes, magic, and combat skills. We have an all new "Perk" system in place for Gothic 3 that allows players to gain extra special benefits depending on what skills they place emphasis on. This assures that the player will be rewarded for making an effort to specialize in a certain area. It would be impossible for one character to master all skills in a single playthrough.

This specialization sounds like it may lead to some pretty distinct heroes. How unique can a player make their character?

In terms of physical customization, we focus on a specific hero character so there's no personalization of [physical] features. Your look is determined by the armor you wear, which is determined by what skills you specialize in. There is armor that can only be worn by magic users, armor that can only be worn by warriors, and armor that can only be worn by thieves. This doesn't sound like a vast difference, but once you see the armor in-game and start to realize that each of these categories is drastically different, it's very cool.

Friend or foe?

Help the orcs pursue higher goals or turn against them by joining the human rebellion. Run the smelly bastards out of town and humans hiding in outlying forests will move back in and resume daily life, all via AI simulation.



"The game's open class system allows the player to create any type of character they want within the parameters of the world."

Blaine Christine, producer, Aspyr Media

How about character builds from an RPG perspective?

Gothic 3's character customization options are really limitless from an RPG standpoint. The game's open class system allows the player to create any type of character they want, within the parameters of the world. I find it very refreshing in an RPG setting to have to make critical character development decisions when I level up. I have no doubt that the community will get heavily involved in finding the optimum type of character spec for getting through the game and we anticipate many great debates on this topic.

Any big technical breakthroughs during Gothic 3's engine development?

Piranha Bytes is one of the most ambitious and talented developers I've had the pleasure to work with. For Gothic 3, they built this proprietary engine from the ground up which incorporates *all* of the latest bells and whistles you expect from a next-gen game. They also created their own game editor, which will be released to the public after the game's release. They took this beautiful hand-crafted world—truly one of the best looking games I've seen recently—and also managed to make it a seamless world with zero load times other than the initial load into the game. For a team of 20 main developers, the technical aspects alone are worthy of praise, not to mention an incredibly deep RPG gameplay experience with this amazing quest system.

What kind of steps were taken to get the immersion right between the player and the world? Third-person game, so stuff like terrain, collision and animations are important...

All of those issues become increasingly complex when you have a hand-crafted world instead of a tiled one, but I think the team has done a fantastic job. In terms of navigation, there are animations for moving on a variety of terrain types. The QA team has been paying special attention to all areas of the world to ensure that collision is as realistic as possible. The collision is extremely realistic in combat, so the player needs to be careful how they use certain types of attacks. One of the coolest things that can happen during combat is to watch an enemy accidentally hit one of their own; one orc hits another on a backswing and it starts a fight between them! This type of realistic collision can be used to the player's advantage by luring dumb enemies closer together so they begin to fight amongst themselves. The animations for the various types of weapons and attacks really need to be seen to be believed.

What sort of sound design should players expect in Gothic 3?

Kai Rosenkranz, the sound designer and composer, has done an incredible job with sound design in Gothic 3. I absolutely love using the bow and arrow simply for the sound of drawing back the bow. The longer you hold the button, the further you pull—and the sound is remarkably realistic. Outside of that, the music is fantastic and sets the mood very well for different scenarios without being intrusive. Of course there are transitions between exploration and combat tracks that provide the appropriate atmosphere. The voice over for Gothic 3 is also *much* better than anything heard in the previous games in the series for the US audience, due to the Hollywood casting director and professional LA-based voice actors (same crew as the Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 voice productions).

Sit back and watch the wildlife go haywire on each other.

How non-linear is Gothic 3's storyline as the player progresses through the game?

The unique hook of Gothic gameplay has always been the open-ended feel of the world and storyline. There is a definite story arc that the player follows as they move through the game world, but the heart of G3's gameplay revolves around exploration and side quests. The side quests are critical to developing your character so you can master the tougher challenges late in the game and the exploration that occurs while completing these quests is what immerses the player in the world as opposed to simply the main storylines. With three different main factions that the player can side with and multiple minor factions, it is *very* unlikely that two players are going to have the same experience when playing through Gothic 3.

We've heard Piranha Bytes mention multiple endings. Will the game feature alternate outcomes based on the player's choices?

I don't want to give away too much right now, but I can tell you that ultimately you must make a choice to support one of the three main factions—the Orcs, Resistance, or Hashishin—and this choice has a major, direct impact on the game's ending.

Good enough. Let's not spoil any surprises! Thanks, Blaine.

Developer	DICE	Publisher	EA
Online/Multi	16-64p Conquest/Assault/Titan	Available	October

Battlefield 2142

Nightmare future is a multiplayer dream

Review

words **Mike Griffin**

The initial phase of the Battlefield 2142 review session was a brutal affair, as a ravaging pack of EA clan testers provided a live boot camp to remember. Is there a draft in here? I thought to myself after a particularly nasty round in the Tunis Harbor map, along the billowy Mediterranean Sea. My skull had been ventilated by another trail of angry SMG bullets. Eventually I fell into the groove and climbed the kill list, building up persistent stats and unlocking new combat gear and gadgets, all while observing a squad-based multiplayer shooter that feels like a futuristic Battlefield 2 update. Digital Illusions' BF 2142 shares its brethren's expertly distilled multiplayer first-person action and the new Titan mode instantly separates it from its peers.

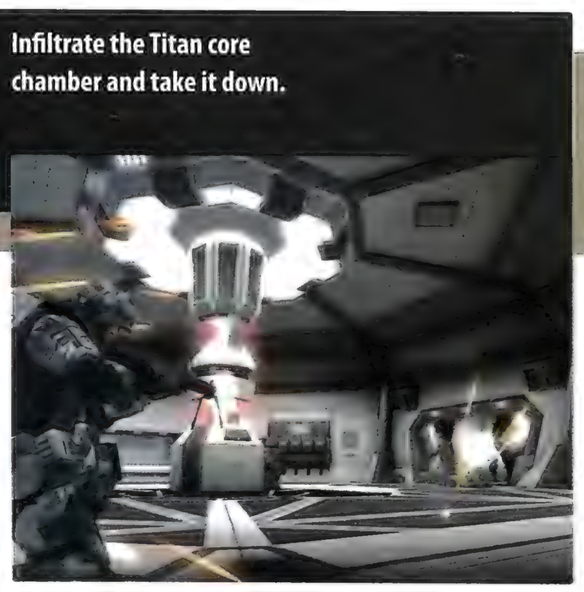
Like the wall of ice that has advanced to the 49th parallel by the year 2140, so too does the level design flow in Battlefield 2142. DICE has used BF 2's core rendering technology to draw good-looking multi-climate environments that play host to a rock-paper-scissors doomsday melee. Conquest maps like Berlin have some of the best infantry street combat the series has ever known, with dozens of satisfying cover spots amid the abandoned skyscrapers' lower levels and surrounding urban sprawl. The familiar BF 2 play mechanics of commander and squad leader work like a charm in 2142, and the cross-kit unlocks (40 total) add loads of soldier depth. Coordination and support comes fast and furious, keeping pace with the action. There are ten Battlefield 2142 maps and they've been chiseled and honed for bullshit-free large scale multiplayer movement and interaction.

If you enjoy this brand of FPS gameplay at all, you'll probably want to play BF 2142 for the Titan maps and vehicles. They rule. Once the energy shield surrounding an enemy Titan is depleted, you can board the giant floating behemoth to begin infiltration. This can be done in a number of ways, including launching yourself hundreds of feet into the air aboard a screaming-fast assault pod. While the skirmish perpetuates itself aboard the Titan, the battle for Titan-slamming missile silos continues far below: awesome mechanized Battle Walkers plod across the land terrorizing infantry while Talon gunships fly past with pockets full of rockets.

At times, Battlefield 2142 sort of feels like you're playing a really good BF 2 mod and with that observation comes a pang of "been there, done that." Regardless, DICE has delivered a deftly constructed multiplayer shooter with titanic replayability that any fan of the form would be advised to experience right away.

Battlefield 2142 — score 8.0

+	Titan gameplay is fresh and it's a blast. Addictive persistent gear and stats. Squash players by landing your assault pod on top of them.
–	The soundtrack is too brooding for its own good. Rounds can be of excessive length on certain maps. Ragdoll bodies look wacky.



Guild Wars Nightfall

In a pickle with a Hero sandwich

Preview

Developer	ArenaNet	**Publisher**	NCsoft
Online/Multi	Persistent online	**Available**	October

New cultures, heroes and villains are introduced to Guild Wars.

words **Mike Griffin**

We'd be remiss not to cover Guild Wars Nightfall again before it launches, around two weeks after this issue arrives. Following a pair of very successful campaigns, the ArenaNet founders are holding true to their promise of delivering full-length GW campaigns twice a year and only charging players for the game—never for the online service. Each campaign is a full-length stand alone title ready to host new players, or people can travel to the new lands with their existing characters and enter the storyline. Another team promise was that of gameplay evolution between campaigns. Guild Wars Factions introduced the duality of different paths, choosing sides in an ancient war. With Nightfall, the NPC henchmen system—a very popular element of the franchise—has been intensified with collectible Heroes that evolve and accept commands. And like previous entries, the hybrid fantasy environments that span this lengthy campaign often resemble a painting more than a polygonal construct.

"...the alluring background for a new danger from a malignant fallen god."

The Hero gameplay should be one of the big draws for RPG players. Previous GW games received significant kudos for allowing players to complete quests "solo"—with the assistance of a band of NPC helpers. Essentially, the henchies attack what you're attacking and autonomously execute their skills. They're discarded on a whim after quests. The new Hero system in Nightfall gives players substantial control over special NPCs that stick around, evolve and level-up. You can prioritize their skill use, tell them to attack or defend, and move them to any area within range of your mini-map, where they stand guard until commanded to move. Using clever flag buttons, players can send their henchmen and Heroes to different spots. You can even hook-up and quest with other players who have their own Heroes. Where do you find Heroes? Sometimes they're a direct component of main story arcs, and in other instances you'll have to complete specific one-time quests to find exclusive NPCs. You can swap in new weapons for your Hero, add enhancement runes to their armor, and totally customize their attributes and skills. Managing all these builds could get tricky, so Nightfall introduces a Template feature that saves and manages all your character and Hero skill builds. You might transfer these templates to another computer, or perhaps send it to a friend for analysis.

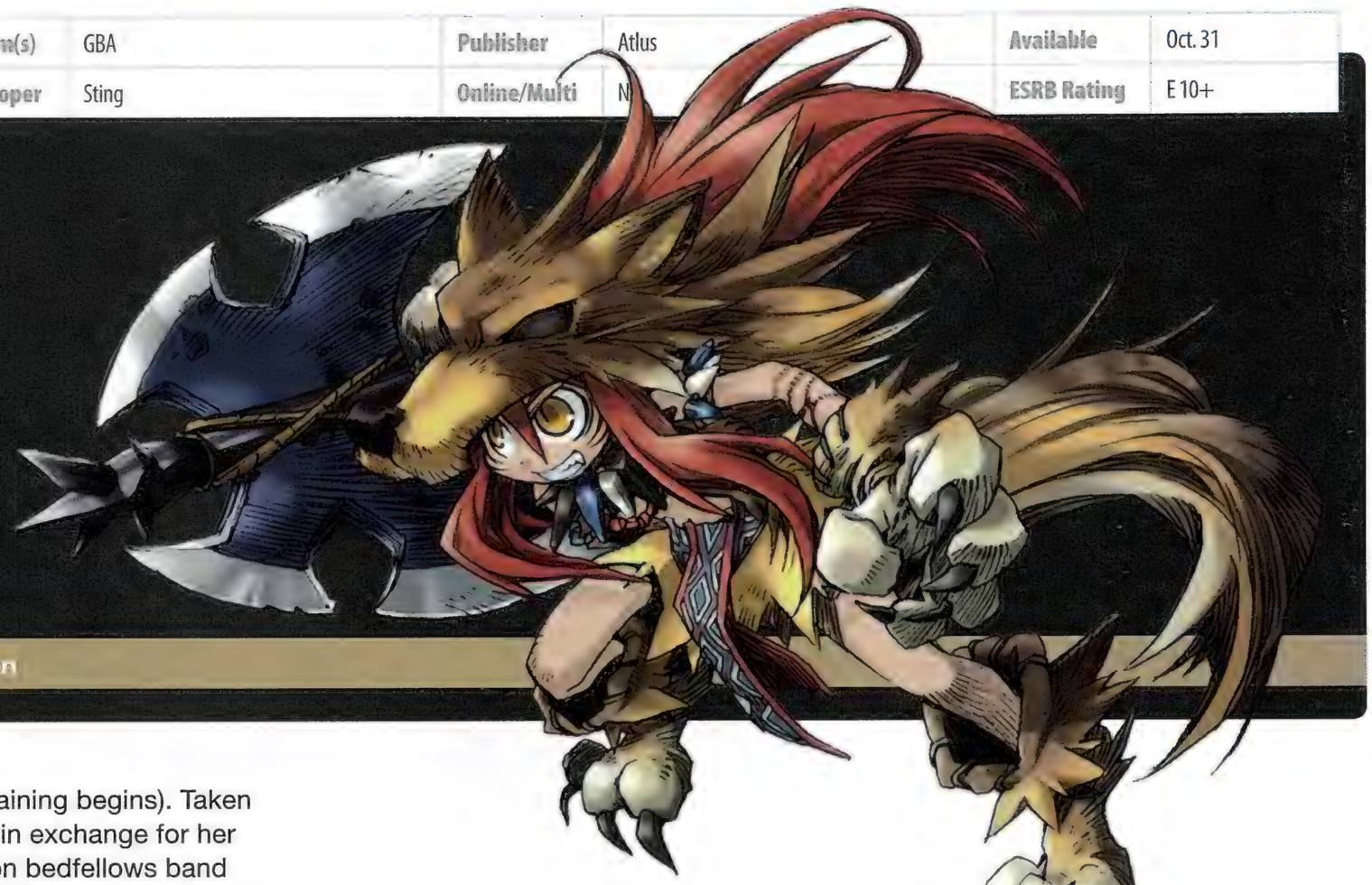
Sun-soaked in another deep ambient score by Jeremy Soule, Nightfall's North Africa/Egypt-inspired Elona continent is the alluring background for a new danger from a malignant fallen god. Over 350 skills for every Guild Wars profession and several new PvP angles will be introduced in Nightfall. Play tests reveal the new Dervish profession is a fast scythe-wielding melee fiend with godly form-altering abilities, while the Paragon is the beacon of the people, a spear-thrower with bolstering holy shouts that buff nearby party members. All told, Nightfall joins the list of must-play autumn releases.

System(s)	GBA	Publisher	Atlus	Available	Oct. 31
Developer	Sting	Online/Multi	N	ESRB Rating	E 10+

Yggdra Union

United they stand

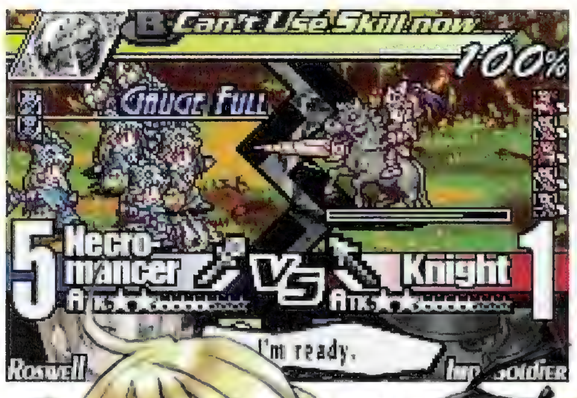
words Dave Halverson



There's a select group of gamers out there that will declare Yggdra Union a must-have the minute they lay eyes on it, due to a level of character design that can only be found in the best Japanese RPGs and anime. They won't be disappointed…

Fantasinia Kingdom has fallen to the New Bronquain Empire, but the princess (Yggdra), aided by her bravest knights, has managed to escape. Cornered by Bronquain assassins she takes refuge in a thief's stronghold, which they waste no time in torching to smoke her out. But before the smoke clears, the thieves, lead by Milanor, return and handily defeat the legion (hence your training begins). Taken up with the princess in exchange for her castle, the uncommon bedfellows band together to reclaim the kingdom, setting out to join forces with Yggdra's remaining forces and Milanor's allies. Luckily for Milanor, Yggdra comes bearing powerful ancient cavalry cards handed down by the knights that gave their lives to protect her-- nothing like a good starter deck in a heated card battle.

Yggrda Union's dialogue unfolds through beautifully-drawn character overlays hovering above a simplistic overhead map, via a stylish, well-executed interface. From there, it's all in the cards: troop movement, deployment… all the usual suspects, but unlike many a card battle the player's role doesn't end once the skirmish begins. Rather than sit back and watch the player, you determine and control aggressive or passive battle, balancing energy and power using the D-Pad, while also keeping an eye on the enemy's aggression level as it climbs during battle. There are nuances galore pertaining to skills, specials, and various tactics, but they are dispersed in moderation allowing the player to grasp each tactic before learning something new. The end result is something of a living graphic-novel fused with gorgeous battles and all the drama you might expect from a game bearing this level of artistry. If you like what you see, the choice is clear: Your kingdom awaits.



Necromancer falls to Knight!

"The end result is something of a living graphic-novel."

Yggdra Union

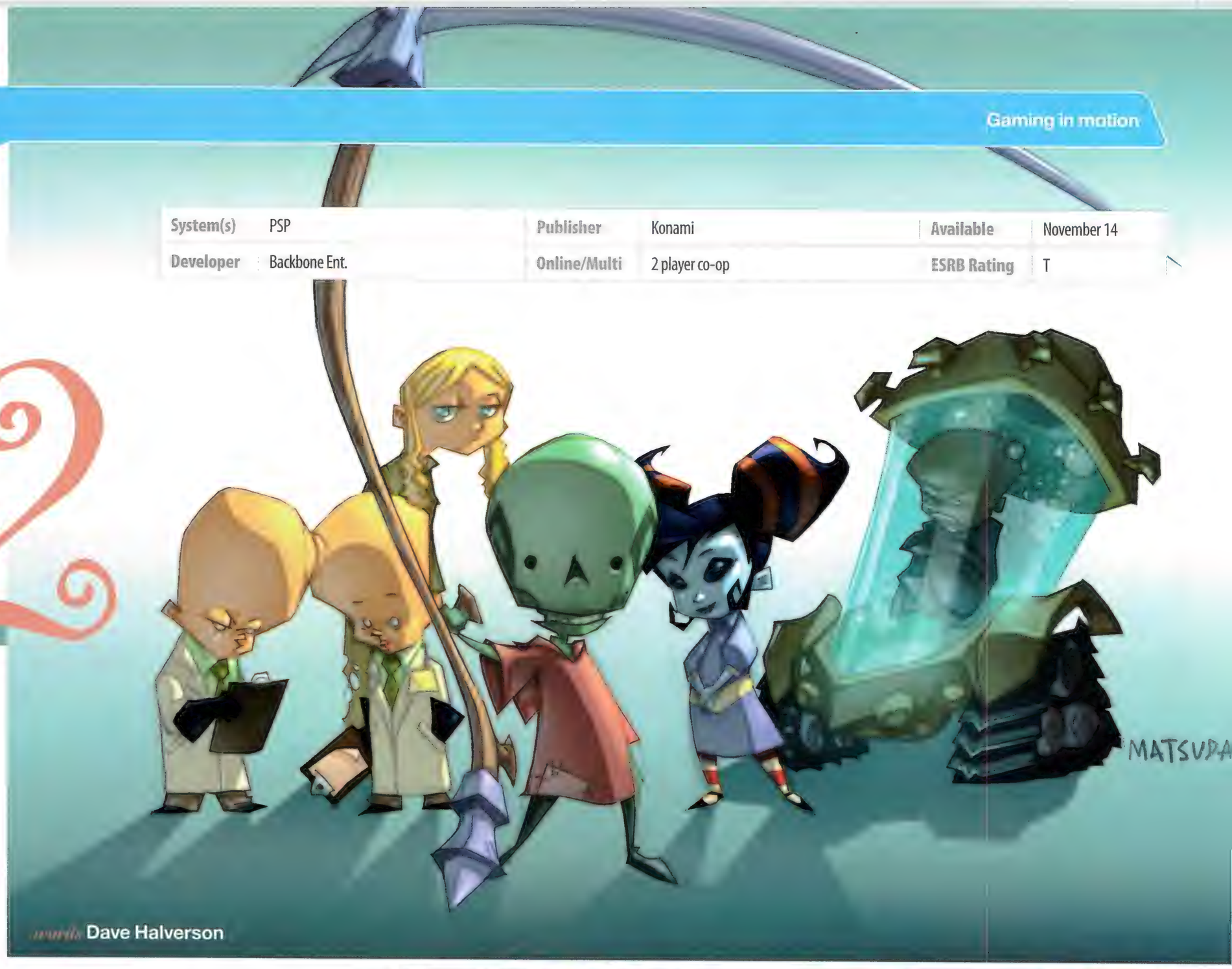
score 8.0

+	Character designs by manga artist Satoko Kiyuzuki and card designs by Riviera: The Promised Land artisan Sunaho Tobe; great interface, good pacing, adept writing with subtle humor, and a valiant soundtrack.
–	Some may not like the sky-cam-type viewpoint on the battle grid.

System(s)	PSP	Publisher	Konami	Available	November 14
Developer	Backbone Ent.	Online/Multi	2 player co-op	ESRB Rating	T

Death Jr. 2
Root of Evil

Sowing the seeds of evil



words Dave Halverson

Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil is more rebirth than sequel. As good as the first game was, it was also considered quirky in the control department, and, while loaded with shooting bliss and wonderfully outlandish cartoon goth, a tad rough around the edges. Backbone could have just tightened things up and given us more of the same for the sequel but instead have completely reworked the formula and created one of the PSP's finest games in the process. On par with Psychonauts, DJ stands as a testament to what original character action games from independent studios bring to the gaming table. And it's never tasted quite so pungent.

Joining DJ for this horticulture of horror is the frisky-as-ever Pandora who can be played as either the main character from the get-go or via wireless in the best 2-player co-op action any handheld device has ever seen. I rarely enjoy co-op action but DJ2 was clearly designed from the ground up to be equally enjoyable as either a single- or two-player experience. Either way, the name of the game remains the same: shooting *and* platforming paradise. Where the original game focused on gunfire and had little room to spare, DJ2 packs even more bang for the buck—tied to a buttery new control system no less—along with scads of platforming elements akin to the finest high-dollar console platforming epics. It's the best of both worlds to the degree that fans of both will find themselves utterly spellbound for the duration. The stages have seemingly quadrupled in size yet manage to look a generation (or two) better. Whatever they left in the PSP's tank the first time they've sucked dry in the second. And to make all of this new real estate more palatable, the control scheme has been skillfully overhauled. Tapping L and R together locks in and disengages strafe mode,

"It's the best of both worlds to the degree that fans of both will find themselves utterly spellbound for the duration."

Not even DJ can resist a 50% sale.

working in accord with the new proximity targeting system. Rather than locking on and off of a single subject, the game works in harmony with the player—a vital piece of the puzzle when you're dealing with such a wily array of spewing flora, hulking goons, and stampeding hordes, such as laser-shooting chickens. No need to wait until levels end to upgrade either. Dead guppy stations are scattered throughout each stage where you can spend collected energy reaped from your victims to upgrade DJ and Pandora's melee attacks and weapon inventory, or assemble additional guns, provided you've found the hidden pieces along the way—reason to clean out each gigantic set piece. Smith and Weston are still hard at work, although the old hub system has been replaced with spirited cinemas that work the entire cast into the story via glorious CG. Hammering the final nail into this super deluxe double-wide coffin, you'll also find a passel of unforgettable bosses, a soundtrack worth owning (it really must be made available) and among the best sound effects on the PSP. It just doesn't get any better on handheld, that I know of. DJ 2 is flat out wall to wall fun from beginning to end.

"It just doesn't get any better on handheld."

When my time is up I hope DJ takes the call. These guys know how to party. **play**

Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil

score **9.5**

+	Immense areas rich in platforming and shooting euphoria, camp heaven in places like "the mall", awesome OST and sound effects, cool story, great CG.
–	Hmmm, let's see. I'd like edge animation . . . and some of the swinging sections may be hard for beginners. Not that that's a negative. Games are supposed to be challenging, remember?

System(s)	PSP	Publisher	SCEA	Available	October 3
Developer	SCEE London Studio	Online/Multi	GameShare	ESRB Rating	T

Gangs of London

Glower of London ...

words **Greg Orlando**

Instead of scaring young toughs straight, it might be better to hand them a copy of Gangs of London for the PSP and let them play it until they renounce violence forever, become straight-A students, and devote all their time to charitable endeavors.

Gangs of London comes to the PSP from the makers of The Getaway and its sequels. The game offers third-person perspective on-foot and vehicle-based action, and players can choose to fight, win, and die as one of five gangs, each with its own set of attributes in terms of its vehicles and members. The game offers stealth, shooting, squad-based combat, vehicle hijacking, car chases, and melee brawls, and this should come as no surprise to anyone who's played any of the Getaways. It will also come as no surprise that London features many of The Getaways' flaws. The apple, after all, never falls far from the tree.

As a jack-of-all-trades, London masters nothing. Its Tom Clancy-esque sneaking bits are certainly not much fun at all; they embrace the tired game cliché that says the mere act of moving while crouched somehow magically transforms someone into a hyper-silent ninja. With the crouch, anything is possible: Players can sidle up to guards and rival gang members, stand directly on their shoes and, impossibly, defeat their peripheral vision. It's also possible to be hunkered down and press into the back of the enemy's legs with no ill effect; such is the power of the crouch.

The game's shooting sequences are similarly flawed. It seems odd that a game about criminals who routinely plug each other with guns would feature a lock-on system that uncannily ignores a nearby target in favor of one that's farther away and also hidden behind cover. Attributing this glitch to someone's planning seems, to put it mildly, cuckoo bananas.

Driving, too, is problematic. This is unfortunate because a lot of the missions

" Missions eschew Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories' aimless wandering, dropping players right into the action."

involve vehicles—not just stealing them or shooting the bad boys who emerge from them, but also using them to get from A to B. There's a genuine lack of speed associated with all the cars. The game lists the Talwar Brothers gang as having the highest vehicle top speed, but even its cars don't cut through the streets as much as they leisurely meander through them. With the sense of velocity excised, so too goes any exhilaration that might occur during the game's many high-speed chases.

On the mean streets, the cars don't handle as well as they should, either. There's a blockiness that's associated with the sports cars as much as it is with its heavier, slower vans. Navigating through London's twisty, curve-laden streets becomes an exercise in banging into stuff, making awkward three-point turns, and restarting when the situation becomes untenable.

Despite its flaws, London manages to eke out a few victories here and there. There's a lot to explore, and the game includes a fairly large city, but the developers have wisely opted to excise the junk. Missions eschew Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories' aimless wandering, dropping players right into the action. Each of the challenges here can be beaten in about five minutes, too, making the game perfectly tuned to a handheld's sensibilities. Best of all, the game records a player's progress after every mission, avoiding the need to put a PSP to sleep if he can't—or doesn't have the time to get to—a fixed, in-game save point.

You've got to admire the English. Always dressed to kill.

Comic book-style cut-scenes introduce every one of the game's story mode missions, and these are all highly well done.

Comic book-style cut-scenes introduce every one of the game's story mode missions, and these are all highly well done. Sony serves up some black humor here, presenting scenarios where a psychotic criminal sends his associates out to fetch a knife from his favorite cutlery place or where a thug's oral fixation gets him in hot water with rival gangs.

Modes such as the quirky zombie-whacking Four Weeks Later let players roam the streets of London unimpeded, and are generally more fun than the game's story mode. Pub games, including darts, billiards (both in the style of the United Kingdom and the United States), and the pin-based skittles, prove to be ample distraction from the game's main fare.

There's even an exceedingly neat, turn- and card-based gang war that does away with the game's flawed driving-shooting-sneaking, replacing them with an addictive bit of strategy and empire building. Gang battle requires players to acquire new territories by purchasing both advantage-conferring cards and soldiers. Each turn allows for three—and only three—moves, and it's essential that not one is wasted. This is, oddly, the best London has to offer.

This portable Getaway has its share of ugly gangster gameplay and bullet holes. Yet in some real ways it presents a nice alternative to the more straightforward Liberty City Stories. Crime doesn't pay as much as it should here, but at least London, as with the real-world city that inspired it, has its crooked charms. **play**

Gangs of London

score 5.0

+	Great comic book style cut-scenes; missions are perfectly tailored for handheld play; excellent strategy-based card game
–	Poor controls; Gangs of London rehashes most of The Getaway games' flaws

Summon Night: Swordcraft Story 2

score 8.0

System	GBA	**Online/Multi**	1-2 Players
Developer	Flight Plan	**Available**	October
Publisher	Atlus	**ESRB Rating**	Teen

Atlus, you sneaky devils... you've timed things perfectly so that gamers have had just enough time to pick up the first GBA Summon Night, beat it, and be left wanting more. Then whammo, here comes the second.

Like the original, Summon Night 2 is a whimsical action RPG that follows the life of a young Craftlord (male or female, your pick) who must refine their weapon crafting skills while also trying to save the world. I was slightly sad to see the main character thrust into the role of hero right off the bat–I enjoyed the fighting tournament opener of the previous game–but thankfully personality and humor once again overflow from the cast of characters you'll meet along the way.

Of course, a game about a weapon craftsman would be pointless without actual weapon crafting, and the amount of options you now have available for forging that perfect sword or axe have been greatly expanded. As well, not only will the fruits of your labor come in handy when engaging in the game's real-time side scrolling battles (which are still loads of fun), but now environmental objects can also be destroyed with the right weapon in hand. Toss in improved graphics and audio, a much lengthier quest, and some additional aspects that I won't spoil for you, and you have another enjoyable RPG to lose many an hour with. **Eric L. Patterson**

Children of Mana

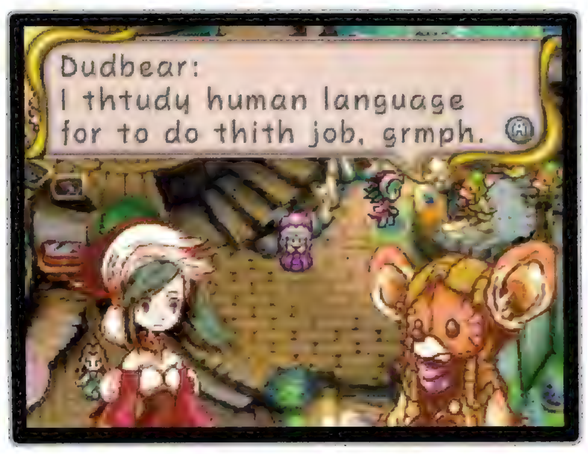
score 6.5

System	Nintendo DS	**Online/Multi**	1-4 Players
Developer	Square Enix	**Available**	October
Publisher	Nintendo	**ESRB Rating**	RP

At its best, Children of Mana is a gorgeous adventure, filled with lovely art and visual character. You can only demand so much production value from your DS, and Children of Mana often reaches high ground in both sophistication and artistry. At its worst, the game degenerates into mundane stretches of dungeon battles, where the same scenery and basic enemies squeeze off the fun.

That's not to see the game doesn't have its stronger gameplay moments. Boss battles are a decent payoff to clearing out each new section, challenging your multiple move sets and level of skill progression. The combat is pretty straight-forward, with simple combos and a stat-elevating system that involves mixing gems. It's about as old-school as you'd want, but then again that's part of the charm that makes Children of Mana more than it probably is without nostalgia by its side.

If it's a story you'd like in this adventure, it's one you're going to need a lot of tolerance and added imagination to fill in for. The threadbare dialogue is awfully random and tacked on, feeling like little more than an excuse to link the next dungeon to the plot. Multiplayer doesn't help much either, given that you're still stuck in the same dungeons as the single-player sexperience. **Brady Fiechter**



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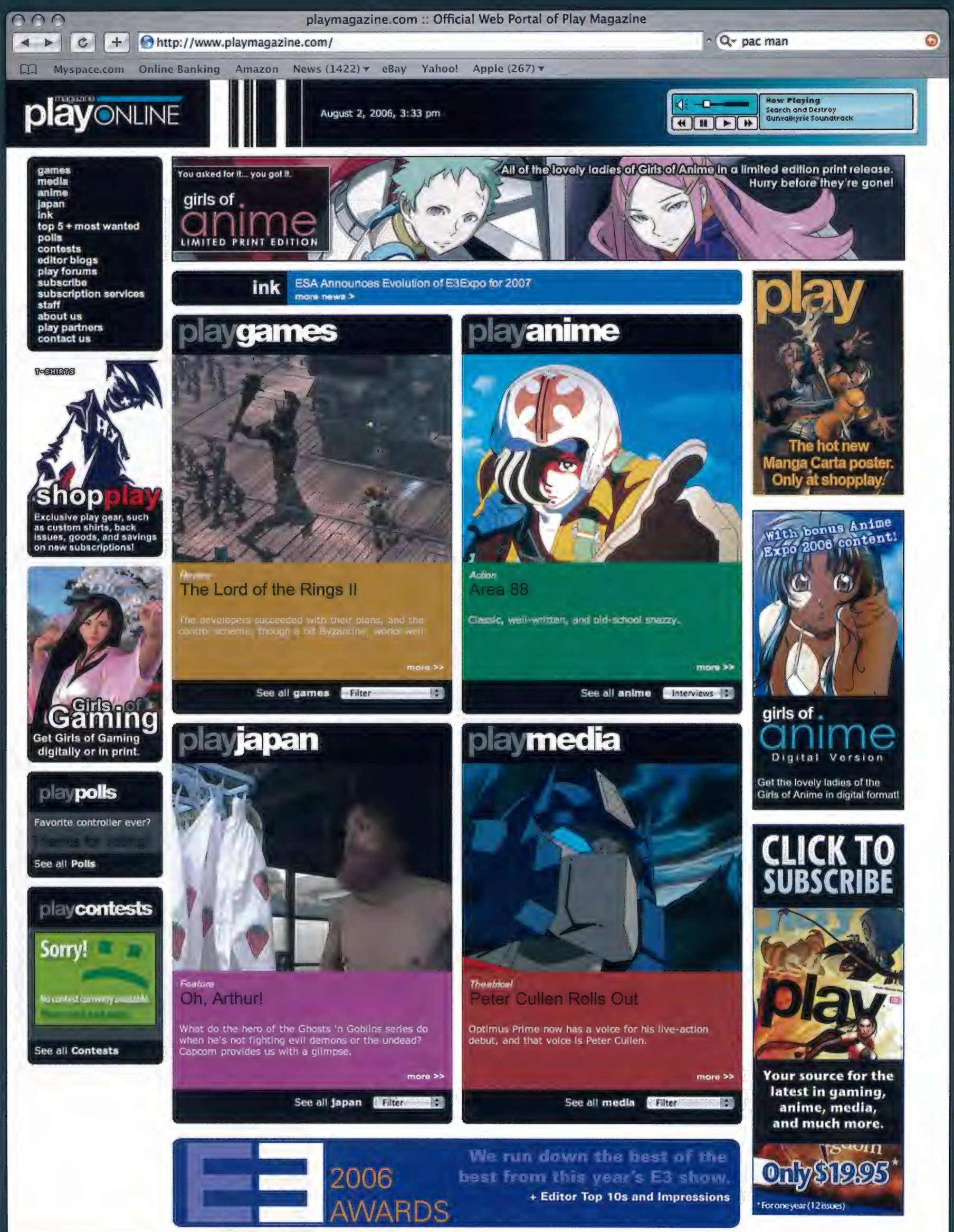

Nacho Libre

score 7.5

System	Nintendo DS	**Online/Multi**	1-4 Players
Developer	Budcat Creations	**Available**	October
Publisher	Majesco	**ESRB Rating**	E 10+

Greeted by the cherub-like Mexican boy, Chancho, in front of the orphanage of St. Lo Que, you are about to embark on the story of the boy who would go on to become the greatest luchador in all of Mexico! His name was Ignacio—but we all know him as Nacho!

Whether you've seen the movie or not or love or loathe the sweet smell of Lucha; you must do the honorable thing and feed your NDS this spicy burrito. Not since Sega invented fish-with-man-heads have I seen anything quite as deliciously broken as Nacho Libre, where Monty Python cut 'n' paste meets the quirkiest 3D mélange the DS has ever seen. The meat of the game revolves around Nacho's rise to become the greatest luchador in all of Mexico, told through bizarre, uncommon and often unnatural mini-games; Nachoball, Chariot Jumping, foot races, salad preparation and so on—all taking spectacular advantage of the stylus—and wrestling matches (featuring all 20 luchadors from the movie) that even the most anti-wrestling advocate will find strangely enthralling if not completely side-splitting. The control, oddly enough, is as user-friendly and precise as the best console wrestlers out there, while the wrestlers and moves themselves are like nothing you've ever seen; the term meat puppets immediately springs to mind. **Dave Halverson**

Magical Starsign

preview

System	Nintendo DS	**Online/Multi**	NA
Developer	Brownie Brown	**Available**	October 23
Publisher	Nintendo	**ESRB Rating**	E 10+

I love role playing games. In fact, I feel a little like I grew up with the genre. Dragon Warrior (a.k.a. Dragon Quest) came out for the NES when I was ten years old, and from that point on, I was hooked.

Magical Starsign is the RPG I should have been given when I was a kid. The sprites are gorgeous, and the characters all overflowing with personality. It's an introductory RPG, perfect for those who are just being introduced to the ideas of turn-based attacks or magical strengths and weaknesses. If you're an adult interested in getting back to basics, Starsign will take you on a familiar journey of friendship overcoming insurmountable odds. There's nothing more imposing than tiny heroes facing off against two-screened enemies.

The writing can get saccharine at times, and a little cliché, but who isn't a little taken with the idea of going to magic school? Starsign is the sequel to Magical Vacation (an import-only title for the GBA), and these kids do take a trip; after losing their teacher on another planet, the heroes take off across the galaxy to save their mentor … and the world.

Starsign's interface is stylus-only. Guiding your avatar around on screen is possible with the D-Pad, but it's apparent that Brownie Brown intends you to poke your way through the galaxy. This is actually pretty nice; how often have you wanted to just select your spell with one click, as opposed to scrolling through a million menus? **Heather Campbell**

The Power of Alchemy in the Palm of Your Hand

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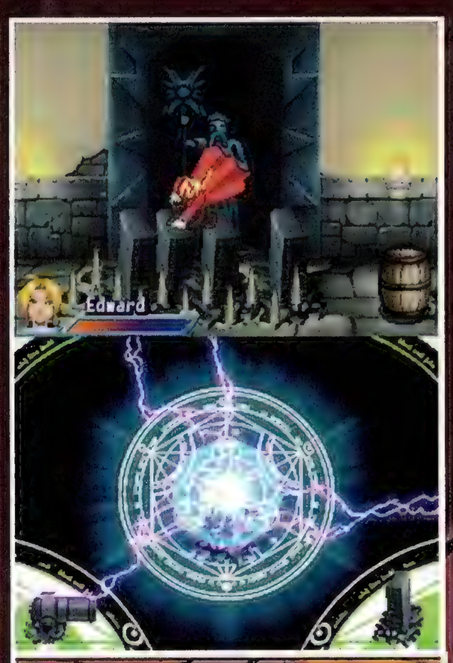

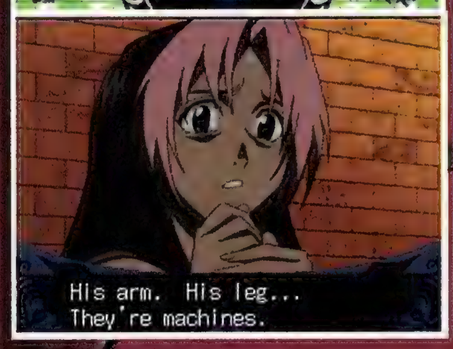

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Naruto: Ninja Council 2

score 7.0

System	GBA	**Online/Multi**	1-2 Players
Developer	Aspect	**Available**	October 10
Publisher	D3 Publisher	**ESRB Rating**	E

Ninja Council 2 continues Naruto's fine ride on the GBA format, retaining all of its endearing pseudo-16-bit blips and bleeps while beefing up the graphics and platforming ante considerably. Divided into side-scrolling levels fraught with "defeat all enemies" challenges and the Chunin Exams torrent of bosses, the usual fare applies-- collecting scrolls and dishing out Jutsu and an array of attacks—only now it looks and plays even better than before, and you can switch between Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura on the fly. You can even call on backup characters during a fight to help tilt things in your favor with their special Jutsus.

Dashing sequences and platforming bits do well to break the monotony, and the character animation is silky smooth. You can also link up for two-player co-op or Vs. play. **Dave Halverson**

Teen Titans 2

System	GBA	**Online/Multi**	NA
Developer	A2M	**Available**	October
Publisher	Majesco Sales	**ESRB Rating**	E10+

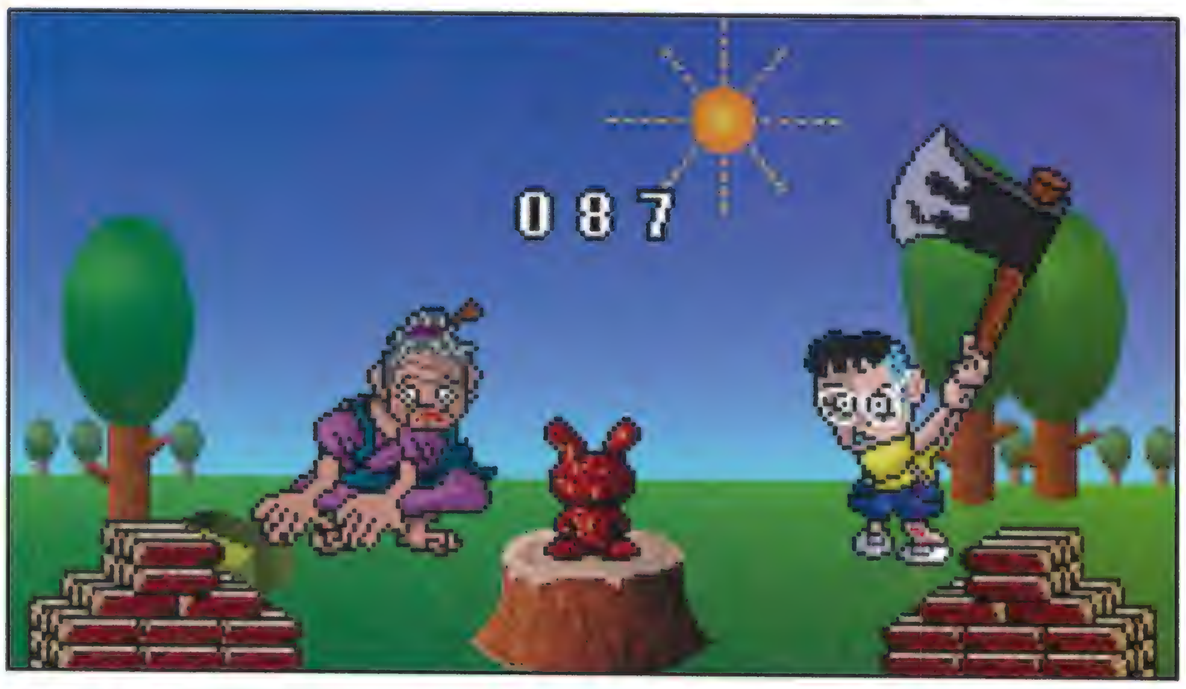
A2M's second soirée with the Titans finds them in a much tighter, better laid out game, riding on the same tried-and-true side-scrolling framework as the original, as they go back to work to thwart The Brotherhood of Evil. . . once Robin frees them. The game begins when Robin breaks free, and begins searching for his friends, wall springing, upper cutting, double jumping, and exploding shuriken tossing his way up the games erector-set type platform puzzles, reminiscent of Spiderman 32-X. Once each Titan is free their unique abilities work in concert with the flow of the game or you can team up, and unleash team attacks; some for offense, others for speed, and so fourth. Bosses include Monsieur Mallah, General Immortus, and the master mind of the Brotherhood of evil himself—the Brain. Wonder if he's playing Big Brain Academy? Apparently not. **Dave Halverson**

WTF: Work Time Fun

score 8.0

System	PSP	**Online/Multi**	2-8 ad hoc
Developer	Sony Computer Entertainment Japan	**Available**	October 17
Publisher	D3Publisher	**ESRB Rating**	Teen

Welcome to menial drudgery as done by WTF: Work Time Fun. Here, you work some 40-odd minigame jobs in order to earn money to buy junk, including more jobs. You'll field baseballs, put an infinite number of pen caps on an infinite number of pens, and generally marvel at how tedium becomes fun here. **Greg Orlando**



ERRATA!

Star Fox Command

Last month, an error occured and we displayed a score for Star Fox Command of 7.5 . The correct score is shown at right. Sorry Fox!

score 8.5

Power Stone Collection

score 6.5

System	PSP	**Online/Multi**	1-4 Players
Developer	Capcom	**Available**	October
Publisher	Capcom	**ESRB Rating**	Teen

Ask people to name the games that defined what made the Dreamcast the must-have system that it was, and it won't be long before somebody brings up Power Stone. Capcom crafted a fighting game series that combined fast-paced action with light-hearted humor, and has now re-introduced the games on the PSP, beefed up and packed with extras. For example, Power Stone 1 gains the added faces from the second game, new items and weapons abound, and even the original Dreamcast VMU mini games make an appearance.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take long to realize that Power Stone's core gameplay hasn't aged so well. Both games just feel somewhat shallow at this point, and while multi-player can still be enjoyable, the fun to be had from single player battles quickly runs out. There's also another problem... while perfect for many a project, the PSP's screen simply cannot handle all the chaotic action presented here. It's far too easy to lose track of what is going on due to the reduced screen size, especially in four-player Power Stone 2 battles, and many of the charms of the game are lost with the loss in resolution. If only this collection had been on a home console instead, with online multi-player support tossed in for good measure. **Eric L. Patterson**

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Released by	Geneon Entertainment	Running Time	NA
Rating	16+	Available	November 21

Ergo Proxy

Gothic beauty

words Heather Campbell

"Ergo Proxy takes itself very seriously. Opening with a quote from Michelangelo, and featuring references to the Turing Test and Descartes."

In the futuristic dome city of Romdo, robots and humans coexist peacefully. Cyborgs are everywhere; they are drivers, servants, friends and co-workers. Called Autoreivs, their integration into human society has allowed for the development of a techno-utopia. They're functional or friendly, like an appliance that can have a conversation. That is, until one Autoreiv becomes cognizant. And then another. Infected with the "Cogito Virus," these androids become self-aware, and set out to discover their identity. Are these robots' souls a product of the virus, or did the virus make them aware of their souls? To answer the question, they start murdering people.

Ergo Proxy takes itself very seriously. Opening with a quote from Michelangelo, and featuring references to the Turing Test and Descartes, this upcoming release from Geneon is a real, *real* hard-core cyberpunk thriller. Ergo Proxy aims at Phillip K. Dick, and then lays out its suspenseful tale in ultimate style. I mean, yeah. This show is gorgeous, dark, smoky and dystopian. Though I don't know if Geneon is releasing the show in hi-res, it originally aired in HDTV, so be ready for some potential 720p detail.

Our protagonist in this gloomy, mysterious, and authoritarian world is Re-I, easily one of the most beautiful heroines to ever grace an anime. With her impeccable makeup and hair, this Intelligence Agency Inspector is a combination of *Ghost in the Shell's* Motoko Kusenagi, *The X-Files'* Dana Scully, and Robin, of *Witch Hunter* fame. Re-I is quiet, Goth, and introspective, and quick to take off her clothes in front of the camera (which, I guess, is an easy thing to do when you have a body like hers). As a girl, I'm jealous of her make-up. I wish I could do my eye-shadow like that.

Not enough can be said about the high production values of this show. Ergo Proxy looks like a theatrical release; the animation is really fluid and slick. Action sequences are smashingly choreographed, and the shot choices are inventive without being disorienting. Ergo Proxy's deep greys aren't the best for afternoon viewing – this is a show meant to be watched at night. It's a stiff, ponderous, evening show, like CSI for the anime set. And it's not like anything else that's being released right now.

The bottom line is Ergo Proxy is pretty, and pretty heady stuff. There haven't been many anime catering to the brain lately, and it's with parched anxiousness that I look forward to quenching my thirst for some anime cyber-noir. It doesn't hurt that the show is so gorgeous; making philosophy palatable is something anime doesn't do well, but with visuals like these, it makes the medicine go down that much smoother.

Ergo Proxy or the new Evanescence? You be the judge.

Thrillville is an amusement park simulator where you take on the role of the favoured nephew or niece of the eccentric uncle Mortimer, the world-renowned owner of the Thrillville theme park franchise. When uncle Mortimer is indisposed, he lets you take over running of five fabulous parks. The only problem is that Uncle Mortimer's arch nemesis Vernon Garrison is trying to knock Thrillville off the map with his Globo-Joy chain of multi-conglomerate parks and will stop at nothing to crush Thrillville like a bug and become number one. The only way to stop him is to keep the parks running smoothly, this involves keeping the guests happy and finding out their needs and wants.

Created by the team behind RollerCoaster Tycoon 3, the game moves away from pure management for the console systems. You can construct your own rides and test them yourself. Daily chores require you to construct new attractions and stalls, and customers need to be kept happy with reasonable prices.

Instead of crunching numbers, some daily chores have been turned into mini-games based on classic games. Using shoot-em-ups, racing games and rhythm games, mundane tasks become exciting events. You can even participate in the games available for your visitors. Instead of being a god, acting with an invisible hand from the sky, you control a park manager to distribute the work and interact with customers. You can even try to befriend customers through conversations to keep them happy.

THRILLVILLE

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EVERYONE 10+

Fantasy Violence
Mild Lyrics
Mild Suggestive Themes

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Released by	Geneon Entertainment	**Running Time**	50 minutes
Rating	16 and up	**Available**	December 5

HELLSING ULTIMATE

Monster Madness

words **Dave Halverson**

Fans of the Hellsing manga who found the TV series overly drawn-out will get their fill and then some from the OVA, which gets right to the bloodletting. Scenes that devoured entire episodes are reduced to minutes—the love-struck vampires on a mutilation spree springs to mind—while others that were too brief, such as Father Anderson's inaugural rampage, have been gratefully prolonged.

Things get underway quickly as Integra's father draws his final breath, leaving The Hellsing Organization to her, sending his brother into a murderous rage. Cut to the bowels of the castle and Alucard's resurrection is at hand: The dark legacy is risen, the psycho sibling eradicated, and it's to the church we go before you can say amen. Seras Victoria's baptism of blood is next, after Alucard is forced to blow a softball-sized hole in her right breast to vanquish a vampire priest whose flock is feeding on Seras's fellow officers. Immediately following the bloody tryst, Ultimate's jarring contrast makes its bubbly debut as Seras wakes up in her new home to a cheeky manga-style dream sequence. Thankfully it's short lived. The next time we see her she's locked, loaded and ready to kill sans any of the indifference she exhibited in the TV series. She won't drink blood yet but she accepts her dark gift straight away. In fact, when the Vatican's killing machine shows up, she's got her boot on a vampire's head, ready to pop it like a melon… Then all heaven breaks loose.

The art and animation is at times stunning—you can see where the animators pick and choose their moments—and I love the way Ultimate is put together, using lots of panning, close-ups, fast edits, digital effects, and diorama-type set pieces; it's a gorgeous amalgam of techniques. The dialogue (all of the TV series voice talent has returned) is also more biting and the gore…bring a tarp. There's a good bit of CG mixed in too, but only when it's needed to enhance a scene, and Seras is simply delightful in all of her newfound immortal revelry. I pray that Hellsing Ultimate finishes as strong as it's started, unlike the TV series which fizzled miserably at the end. Something tells me I don't need to worry. There must be enough Seras Victoria collectibles money to run a small country by now.

Hellsing Ultimate score **9.0**

+	All of the blood, none of the fluff. Ultimate gets right to the business at hand: Wholesale elimination.
–	Manga infused scenes provide stark contrast

"Cut to the bowels of the castle and Alucard's resurrection is at hand..."

Ergo Proxy

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Discover the dark side of being alive

from the creator of Samurai Champloo

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now reading

the wonderful world of manga

Disgaea

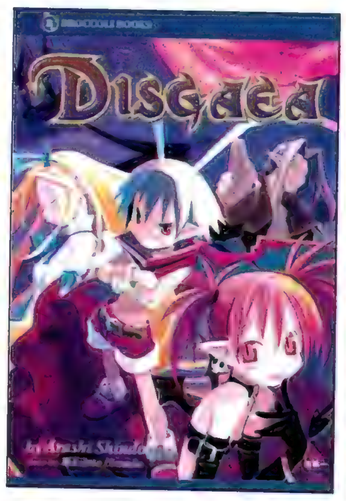
Hellacious High-Jinx

words Dave Halverson

Publisher	Broccoli Books	**Genre**	Action/Comedy	**Volume**	1
Story	Arashi Shindo	**Art**	Arashi Shindo	**Rating**	13+

It's easy to see why so many gamers flock to the Disgaea series every chance they get. Who knew that demons were so much fun? The manga gets underway with Etna waking up Prince Laharl from his two-year nap, during which his father, King Krichevskoy, the overlord of the Netherworld, has died. Showing little to no remorse—hey, they're demons—Laharl receives a rude awakening when he goes to claim his throne. Seems that during his two-year snooze a passel of dysfunctional demons have been gunning for the big chair…time to clean house. Together with his vassals, the fork-tongued Etna and Flonne the love zealot join Laharl for a Netherworld excursion that'll make you clamor for the gates of hell.

Read it if... You can read. 198 pages of fun to be had.



Etna: Cuddliest demon in the Netherworld

Snow

Big Bang Theory

words Dave Halverson

Publisher	TokyoPop	**Genre**	Action		
Volume	1	**Rating**	13+		
Story	Morgan Luthi	**Art**	Morgan Luthi		

"the best thing to come out of TokyPop's Rising Stars."

Snow would be more at home as an animated feature—it certainly reads like one—but I'll take this amazing manga just as well. When a destroyer of worlds harnessed within a human host gets a conscience, the universe's warmongers bear down on the remote planet Hub; the last bastion for the galaxy's outcasts. There, Ghost finds refuge with a band of freedom fighters, working to maintain a sense of order in the city. But trouble is close behind… Morgan Luthi is the best thing to come out of TokyPop's Rising Stars of Manga by far.

Read it if... Giant robots, space pirates, aliens, interstellar burger joints. What's not to love?

Welcome to the NHK

The Anime Conspiracy

words Dave Halverson

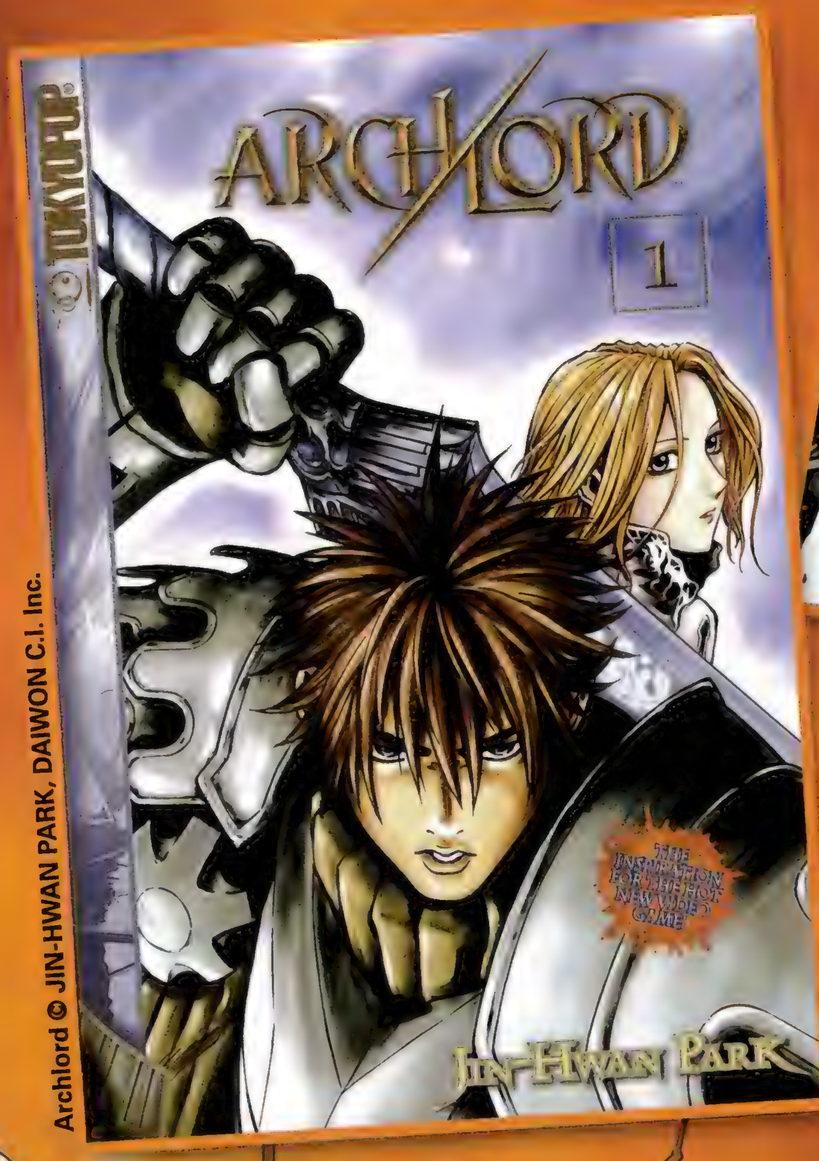
Publisher	TokyoPop	**Genre**	Drama/Comedy		
Volume	1	**Rating**	18+		
Story	Tatsuhiko Takimoto	**Art**	Kendi Oiwa		

"Tatsuhiro hasn't been out of his house in four years."

College dropout turned shut-in (or hikikomori) Satou Tatsuhiro hasn't been out of his house in four years. Making matters worse, his next-door neighbor blasts anime music at the crack of dawn, and the mail-order drugs he's on are causing his refrigerator, TV, and speakers to come to life in his dreams, that—any loyal appliances would-- alert him to the fact that NHK (the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation) is really a covert operation converting shut-ins into otaku through high-quality anime series. How we get from here to creating the greatest hentai game ever is an illegally good time.

Read it if... You yearn for the kind of decadent comedy writing that dried up here decades ago, if it ever existed at all.

THE STORY OF HEROES THAT BECAME LEGENDS... BEGINS IN THE MANGA!!



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Blood+: Twin Wing Battle Ronde

Publisher: SCEI | **System:** PlayStation 2 | **Available:** Now (Japan)

There are 2 PS2 games based on the new Blood + TV series (coming to the U.S. this winter) out in Japan and they're both action games; one from Grasshopper (Blood + One Night Kiss) which is okay, and the game you see here from Sony, Blood +: Twin Wing Battle Ronde, the superior of the two. There's dialogue and events aplenty but the meat of the game is pure action, so if you're looking for the next thing in anime based imports, look no further.

listen to this

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Selections from Final Fantasy XII OST

Publisher: Tofu Records

Composed, arranged and produced by Hitoshi Sakimoto; when you've finished playing the greatest RPG ever created, the OST is the best way to reconnect.

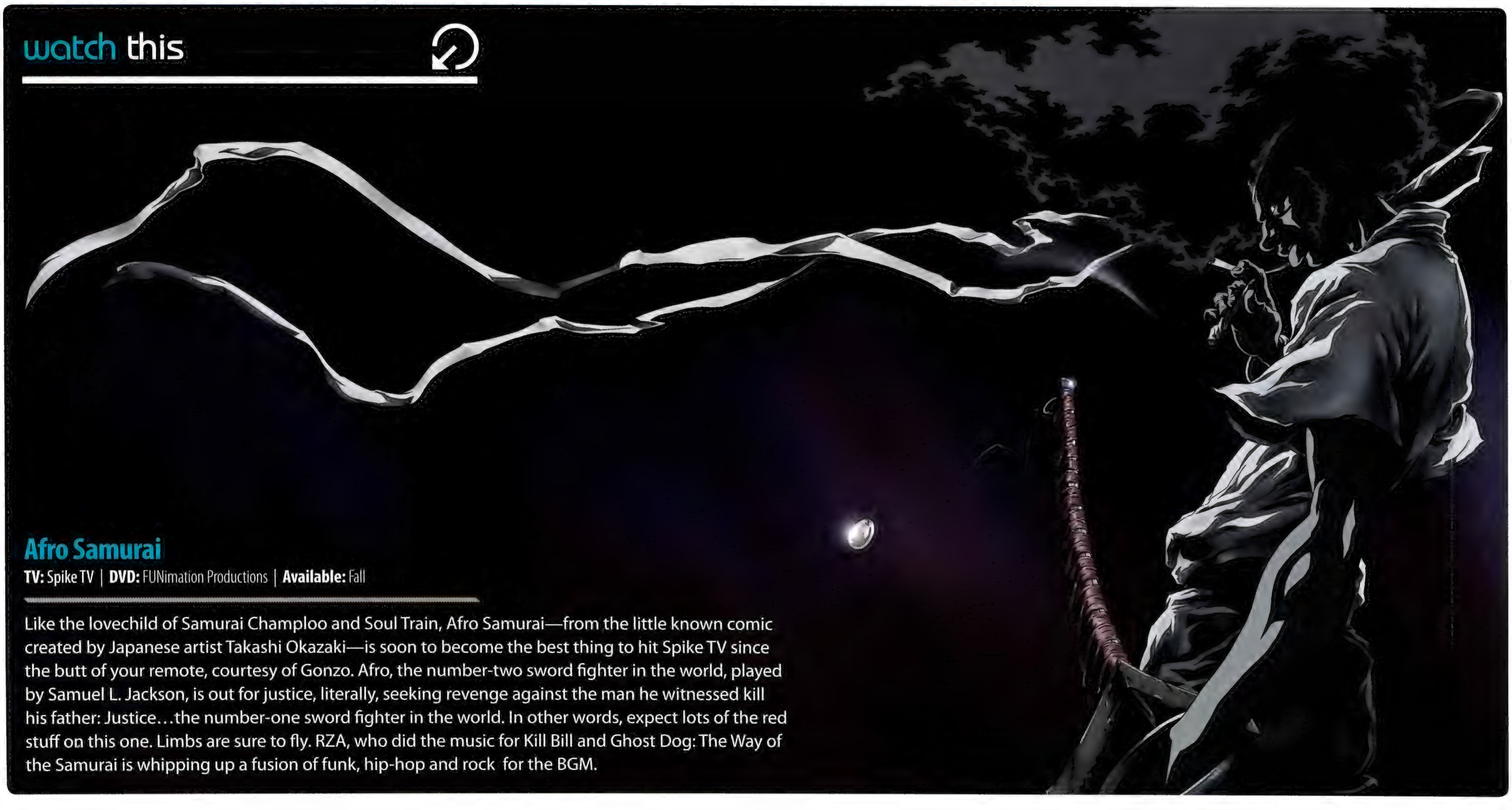
read this

Kingdom Hearts Chain of Memories

Publisher: TokyoPop | **Volume:** 1 | **Rating:** All Ages
Adapted by: Shiro Amano | **Genre:** Fantasy

The door to Kingdom Hearts will open once more as Sora, Donald, and Goofy enter Castle Oblivion in search of King Mickey and Riku. Never leave a mouse behind! Disney-infused fantasy awaits all who turn these pages.

watch this



Afro Samurai

TV: Spike TV | **DVD:** FUNimation Productions | **Available:** Fall

Like the lovechild of Samurai Champloo and Soul Train, Afro Samurai—from the little known comic created by Japanese artist Takashi Okazaki—is soon to become the best thing to hit Spike TV since the butt of your remote, courtesy of Gonzo. Afro, the number-two sword fighter in the world, played by Samuel L. Jackson, is out for justice, literally, seeking revenge against the man he witnessed kill his father: Justice…the number-one sword fighter in the world. In other words, expect lots of the red stuff on this one. Limbs are sure to fly. RZA, who did the music for Kill Bill and Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai is whipping up a fusion of funk, hip-hop and rock for the BGM.

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Cartoon Violence
Crude humor
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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play magazine

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

2006

words Halverson/Siller

Marvel™ Ani-Movie: The Animated Movie Maker

It works like this: First, select one of the four backgrounds to set the scene and place it on the base of the Ani-Movie Studio. Second, connect the unit to the television and pose an action figure or any object you would like to feature on the background. Capture the action with the built-in, adjustable digital camera. Next, move the object ever so slightly and capture that image with the camera as well. When you have finished shooting your scenes, press "play" and watch the fluid motion of your animated movie come to life on the small screen. It's that easy with Jazware's Marvel Heroes Ani-Movie Studio. The Ani-Movie is easy to use and loads of fun, especially if you've got a closet full of action figures. You can add sound effects, edit your creations, or save them to memory card to expand your stop-motion masterpieces. Play nice.
Available at Toys 'R Us 60.00

TAC Guitar Mania controllers

Freedom V Wireless Guitar Controller $54.99
The Cadillac of air guitars, the freedom V features AutoSense™ 2.4GHz Wireless (100 ft. range—800 hours of play on 4 AA batteries), FeatherTouch™ fret buttons for buttery control on the fast-action neck, Smart BiDirectional Accelerator™ for Star Power (a sensor that allows you to simply tilt-upwards on the controller to enter the Star Power bonus mode rather than having to play the controller while raising the guitar vertically), Patent Pending Button Cluster (flush start button to avoid accidental pausing), the Super Whammy System™ which incorporates a heavy gauge coil spring for extreme durability, Comfort Neck™ and the Cool Blue Backlit Rocking Rhythm™ Strum Bar tuned for a tighter feel and a more precise response. Flat out the sickest guitar controller on the planet.

Look ma' no strings!

Rocking V Wired Guitar Controller $39.99
All of the features of the Freedom V only wired and sans the cool backlit Strum Bar.

Shredder Guitar Controller $29.99
Nice guitar—small price: The closest thing to the licensed Guitar Hero guitar, the Shredder comes with a sticker sheet to personalize your axe, features smart switch positioning to avoid accidental pauses while you're going mental, and just looks and feels altogether nicer than the licensed model.

Available online at www.theguitarmania.com or at Fry's Electronics, Circuit City and other fine retailers.

Banshee 5.0 Desktop Speaker

The banshee desktop speaker is the first all-in-one, 5.0 surround sound listening station for your ipod, MP3 player, or PSP. Incorporating 5 surround sound speaker components into one compact cabinet the Banshee emits solid bass and ultra crisp highs. Once you play a PSP game therhered to this bit of tech you'll never look at those earbuds again. Comes with extra long chords and a cradle for your PSP movie viewing pleasure. Stay put and play it loud. 129.99 bansheeaudio.com

Joytech Nitro Racing Wheel for Xbox 360

With its high-intensity dual-vibration feedback, six-level user -electable steering sensitivity, integrated headset for Xbox Live, four wheel-mounted paddles and sequential stick, non-slip accelerator and brake, full-rubber wheel head, and glowing Xbox guide button the Nitro certainly has the goods, but how does it perform? Very well; in fact it might be the best wheel we've ever tested. Smooth precision feel and bells and whistles aside the Nitro uses suction cups over clamps making it more accessible and also comes with adjustable lap brackets. Pity it's not wireless, but for under a hundred bucks it's a lot of wheel. Serious PGR3 fans need apply. $89.99

Messiah - Generation Nex Videogame Console

The prettiest version of the NES/Famicom hardware seen to date, the Messiah features lots of little red LEDs to signify that various operations are functional and has the modular capability for using wireless controllers (sold separately), as well as existing peripherals like the Zapper light guns. There are two separate cartridge ports for both the Japanese Famicom games on top and for the US NES titles in the front and this is great for collectors of both.

The controllers feature fast response buttons so that you are never left in a bind and both turbo and slow-mo enhancements. The turbo works well enough, but the slow-mo is almost useless unless you don't mind getting a headache in the heat of battle while the unit alternates normal and pause mode to create this function. The placement of these feature functions is also a little strange as the turbo and slow-mo are placed where the traditional Select and Start buttons are and those are in turn placed above the A and B buttons. Two shoulder buttons have also been added but merely double for the A & B functions. Once you get used to this arrangement, everything is okay for play. The Messiah – Generation NEX played everything we plugged into it like a champ; if it's on your holiday buying radar, proceed full steam ahead.

This just in!

Messiah is introducing a brand-new controller for the NEX that will be out this holiday called the Generation NEX Wireless Arcade Stick. That's right, a WIRELESS ARCADE STICK for classic gaming!

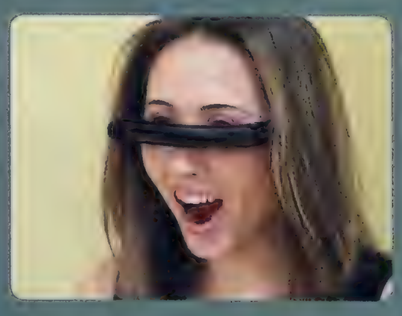
For pricing and availability go to www.playmessiah.com

Retro gaming doesn't get any better than this. Everything you see here works as good as it looks.

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

MicroOptical myvu personal media player

The myvu personal media viewer is compatible with the 30GB, 60GB and new 80GB video iPods and is the perfect solution for viewing movies purchased from the new iTunes 7. The myvu comprises lightweight eyewear with built-in video viewing and audio systems, an ultra-thin battery pack for six hours of viewing time, and a small pendant that offers easy access to all controls. Resembling a pair of thin, dark sunglasses, the viewing experience is comparable to a 27-inch screen from six feet away. Inside the front of the unit is MicroOptical's patented display system, adapted from hardware developed for the military to allow tank drivers and others to simultaneously view both information *and* surroundings. Unlike an immersive headset system that blocks the user from seeing anything but the screen and, therefore, significantly limits its usefulness, myvu offers users "situational awareness." Through the use of a thin optical bridge, users can see over and under the screen while continuing to be aware of their surroundings. Complete with a premium travel case with room for your iPod as well as AC and car adapters for charging, the myvu system provides iPod lovers an unsurpassed personal experience in portable video watching. $399



The myvu personal media viewer, universal edition, can be used with virtually any media device with a video-out port. $299.99

www.myvu.com

ANYCOM BSH-100 Stereo Headphones + BluNa iPod Adaptor

Listen to music in crystal clear digital stereo quality, talk wirelessly on your cell phone or chat on your PC with Anycom's new lightweight, comfortable headset. As a stereo headset you can listen to music streamed from your MP3, iPod, PDA, or PC, or connect the BSH-100 to your cell phone or PC for online gaming or chat. Best of all…they don't fall off. Head bang to your heart's content.

MSRP, $119.99; Available bundled with Audio Gateway for $199.99

Nyko Intercooler 360

Feeling a little paranoid during those all night play sessions? Snap on Nyko's Intercooler 360 and chase your troubles away. The Intercooler increases airflow and reduces heat throughout the 360's innards for improved protection of the internal circuitry, providing extended system life and reliability: No AC Adaptor required. We could do without the massive logo running down the side, but you should always wear protection. 19.95

Qmotion-XBoard

The XBoard connects to your PC, PS2 or Xbox and is compatible with all the best boarding games, like SSX, Amped and the Tony Hawk series, and allows players to control the game by measuring weight shift and foot movement through the board-shaped platform for an "enhanced gaming experience that simultaneously promotes physical fitness". Enhanced maybe…physical fitness—if you get winded doing this, see a doctor. No doubt the XBoard delivers as promised but it's not without a learning curve, and, well, some people look better holding a controller. $100.00 www.qmotions.com

PSP Speaker Fly Surround Sound Speakers

Make your PSP look like a winged spy cam and add killer audio at the same time with PDP's Headbanger Audio PSP Speaker Fly Surround Sound Speakers. Speakers rotate for easy storage, it's great for watching movies, and the sound is surprisingly good – easily the best mobile speaker solution for the PSP. Available at GameStop. 79.99

VG Pocket

VG Pockets go anywhere, run forever on 3 AAA batteries, play loads of classic games, and look and function great. We play-tested all four and they deliver as advertised.

Caplet Play loads of classic 16-bit games on the Caplet's 2.5" TFT LCD 640x240 backlit display or plug-and-play on your TV. The Caplet system is pre-loaded with 35 updated classics, including Burger Time, Space Invaders, Bust-A-Move, Bubble Blaster, BoxBoy, Yummy and Tasty, Adventures of Waldog, Deep Storm, Hanoi Tower, Bubble Wubble, Final Escape, Leapfrog, Wolfy's Quest, Craig the Caterpillar, Win or Lose, Legendary Hero, Crystal Cavern, Kart Racer X, Final Round Tennis, Magic Jelly Battle, Blocks II, Blaze Busters, Rotating Puzzle, Switch and Mix, Underwater Pinball, Sudoku Quiz, Survival Challenge, Greedy Grabber, Puzzle Chance, Go Back Home, Victory Road, Jet Racing, Motojet Mania, Code Name: Plumber, and Pop Goes the Ball. $39.99

Tablet The Tablet features a 2" TFT LCD 640x240 backlit display and plays 25 preloaded 8-bit classics including Frogger, Mutant Hunt, Off Roader, Risk it, Sudoku Quiz, Funny Fung, Lord of the Jewels, Leaper the Frog, Stellar Attack, Battle Blocks, Construction Jack, Memory Matching, Track Star, River Quest, Star Alley, Motocross Racer, Pinball Labyrinth, Billiards Master, Vitamania, Mr. Onion, Delivery Express, Birds of Prey, Whack the Critter, Survival Challenge, Stuntman Daredevil, and Delta Fighter. $29.99

Carrying cases and AV cables for TV play are sold separately. Two Disney versions are also available: Game iT! Princess Pals and Game iT! Classic Pals each featuring a 16-bit processor and 12 fu- filled kid-tastic Disney games.

Nerf Wireless Controller

Never feel guilty about heaving your controller again! Squeeze it, spike it, twist it… run it over with your car…no, don't, it'll break. It may be late in the game but the Nerf Wireless Controller from Pelican is hard to resist. The soft pliable Nerf shell protects the Pelican-quality innards, creating a wireless with great performance, max durability and a feel all its own. Available at retailers nationwide for $29.99.

Cars

Movie: A Extras: A

Directed by: John Lasseter

Starring: Owen Wilson, Paul Newman, Bonnie Hunt, Larry the Cable Guy, Cheech Marin, George Carlin

Released By: Buena Vista Home Entertainment

Rated: G

Wow, real tough call here, gee, let's see…is Disney/Pixar's Cars a worthy DVD? Will a triple whopper with cheese stop your heart? Heck yeah it is. How can anyone not love a passel of talking cars representing every facet of life, from middle-aged ladies bearing youth's over-the-crack tattoos to hayseeds that have yet to discover FM radio? And then there's the message, that it's not whether or not you win the race but how you make an audience ooh and ahh their way from the theatre to the fast food place, to the super market, to the toy store until their entire existence has been consumed by Lightning, Sally, Mater, and the rest of Radiator Springs. But enough about my collection. This is one fantastic movie, and the DVD is packed with a fair amount of extras (under the assumption that the making-of fun will be released at a later date closer to Cars 2 to further fatten the massive gross) including the all-new animated short: Mater and the Ghostlight, the Academy Award-nominated short: One Man Band, John Lasseter's inspiration for Cars, deleted scenes, and the requisite teasers. **DH**

X-Men: The Last Stand

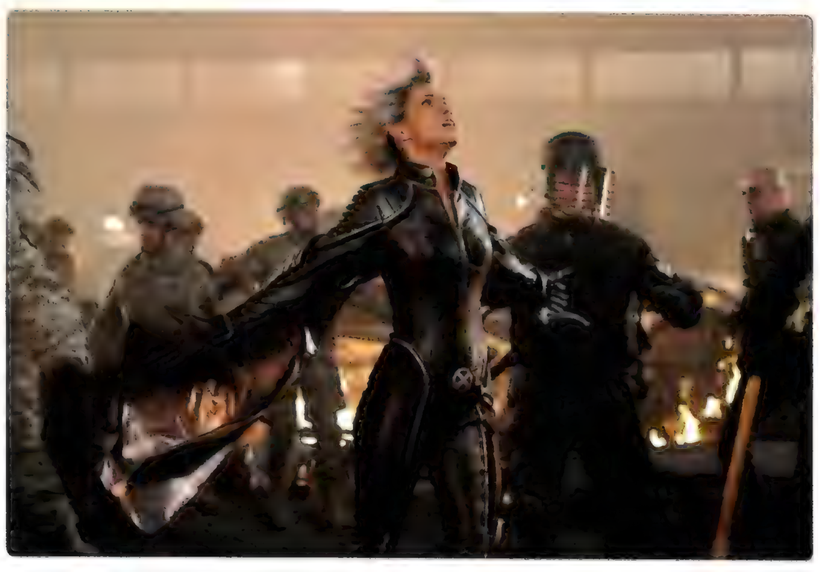
Movie: C+ Extras: B

Directed by: Brett Ratner

Starring: Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Ian McKellen, Famke Janssen, Anna Paquin, Kelsey Grammer, Patrick Stewart

Released By: 20th Century Fox

Rated: PG-13



Third time could use some charm, but this potentially final version of the X-Men franchise packs a marginally entertaining punch. The first two films played more on character and set-up, drawing us into a cloud of isolation, discrimination and hatred. While the same themes carry over into *The Last Stand*, the impact is lost as the script hurls into a special effects party with throngs of X-men ripping every thing on screen apart. I have to say, I enjoyed the break from the emphasis on the limp relationship building of the previous films, but one loud action sequence too many brings the film down in its climax. Better served for casual fans than freaks of the comic-book—plenty of sloppy liberties are taken with the source material this time out—*X-Men: The Last Stand* is just another summer blockbuster series yearning to be more than it can possibly deliver.

Monster House

Movie: B+ Extras: B+

Directed by: Gil Kenan

Starring: Steve Buscemi, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Mitchell Musso, Sam Lerner, Spencer Locke, Jason Lee

Released By: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Rated: PG

I played the Monster House game before I saw the movie so I thought that the bulk of the movie would take place inside the house where a gaggle of pipes, boilers, lamps, and appliances would coalesce to create a kind of Resident Evil Home Depot. But DJ, Chowder, and Jenny don't actually approach the house until we're looking at our watches. All the more reason to be awed at how captivated I was by the motion capture, with all of its stunning detail, and how willing Zemeckis and Spielberg were to cross the line from prepubescent schlock to actual macabre territory. Kids aren't as squeamish as the bulk of movies made to keep them still for two hours would have us believe. Jason Lee is great as Bones, John Heder the perfect Skull (hey, I know that guy!) Steve Buscemi plays a great grumpy old man (I used to do skids on that guys front lawn) and is it just me or is the fact that Kathleen Turner was perfectly cast as a man-eating house a bit sad? Peggy Sue got scary! Three featurettes in the house. **DH**

The DaVinci Code

Movie: C Extras: C

Directed by: Ron Howard

Starring: Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou, Ian McKellen, Jean Reno, Paul Bettany, Alfred Molina, Jürgen Prochnow

Released By: Columbia Pictures

Rated: PG-13

The Davinci Code is a bloated, unconvincing, melodramatic account of… well, not much, really, other than two talented yet miscast actors running from the law as they search for the Holy Grail. There's lots of talk of symbols and Christ and Mary and the veiled transgressions of the Catholic Church, but little talk of anything with much meaning or weight to drive the potential intrigue of the story. The movie softens its convoluted fact with glossy fiction, which would play well enough if both had more meat on their collective bones. In all its style and big-budget noise, *The Davinci Code* does begin to pick up steam toward the end, drawing us into its web of mystery, but you're ultimately left with a feeling that the book carried more charge. **BF**

BACK OF THE BOOK

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

"Games are going to improve in every way. I believe in this medium as much as it continues to let me down and frustrate me."

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BIBLE BLACK

THE GAME

kitty gokko

ACTIVE Software Create

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Hundreds of units participated in this year's *Team BLINK Challenge.*

FASTEST AVERAGE TIMES

Cub Scout Division

#1 - Pack 89	Kennett, MO
#2 - Pack 15	Broadalbin, NY
#3 - Pack 31	Charlestown, NH

Boy Scout Division

#1 - Troop 236	Hurricane, WV
#2 - Troop 347	St. Augustine, FL
#3 - Troop 620	Salmon, ID

Venturing Division

#1 Crew 52	Deerfield, IL
#2 F1ght3rs	San Jose, CA
#3 Crew 515	Tracy, CA

Girl Scout Division

#1 GS Troop 4609	Moundsville, WV
#2 GS Troop 1846	Chicago, IL
#3 GS Troop 27	Gaylord, MI

Camp Division

#1 Camp Tesomas	Rhinelander, WI
#2 Camp V-Bar	Perkinston, MS
#3 Scout Camp	San Antonio, TX

MOST TOTAL POINTS

Cub Scout Division

#1 - Pack 15	Broadalbin, NY
#2 - Pack 411	San Jose, CA
#3 - Pack 92	East Troy, WI

Boy Scout Division

#1 - Troop 239	Claridge, PA
#2 - Troop 540	Madison, NC
#3 - Troop 740	Fayetteville, NC

Venturing Division

#1 Crew 540	Madison, NC
#2 Crew 515	Tracy, CA
#3 Crew 473	Flushing NY

Girl Scout Division

#1 GS Troop 1846	Chicago, IL
#2 GS Troop 4609	Moundsville, WV
#3 GS Troop 151	Palmdale, CA

Camp Division

#1 Camp Tesomas	Rhinelander, WI
#2 Scout Camp	San Antonio, TX
#2 Camp V-Bar *(A tie for #2)*	Perkinston, MS

Top three units from each division are above!

Out of the Box Publishing would like to thank Scouting, adult volunteers, and the players for participating in this year's ***Team BLINK Challenge!***

Keep playing! *BLINK* players can still get timed and rated. The fun continues with the **Team *BLINK* Open.** Units already signed-up may continue to record times and keep working on achieving the Master Level patches!

New units may sign-up for the Team *BLINK* Open at www.teamblinkopen.com.

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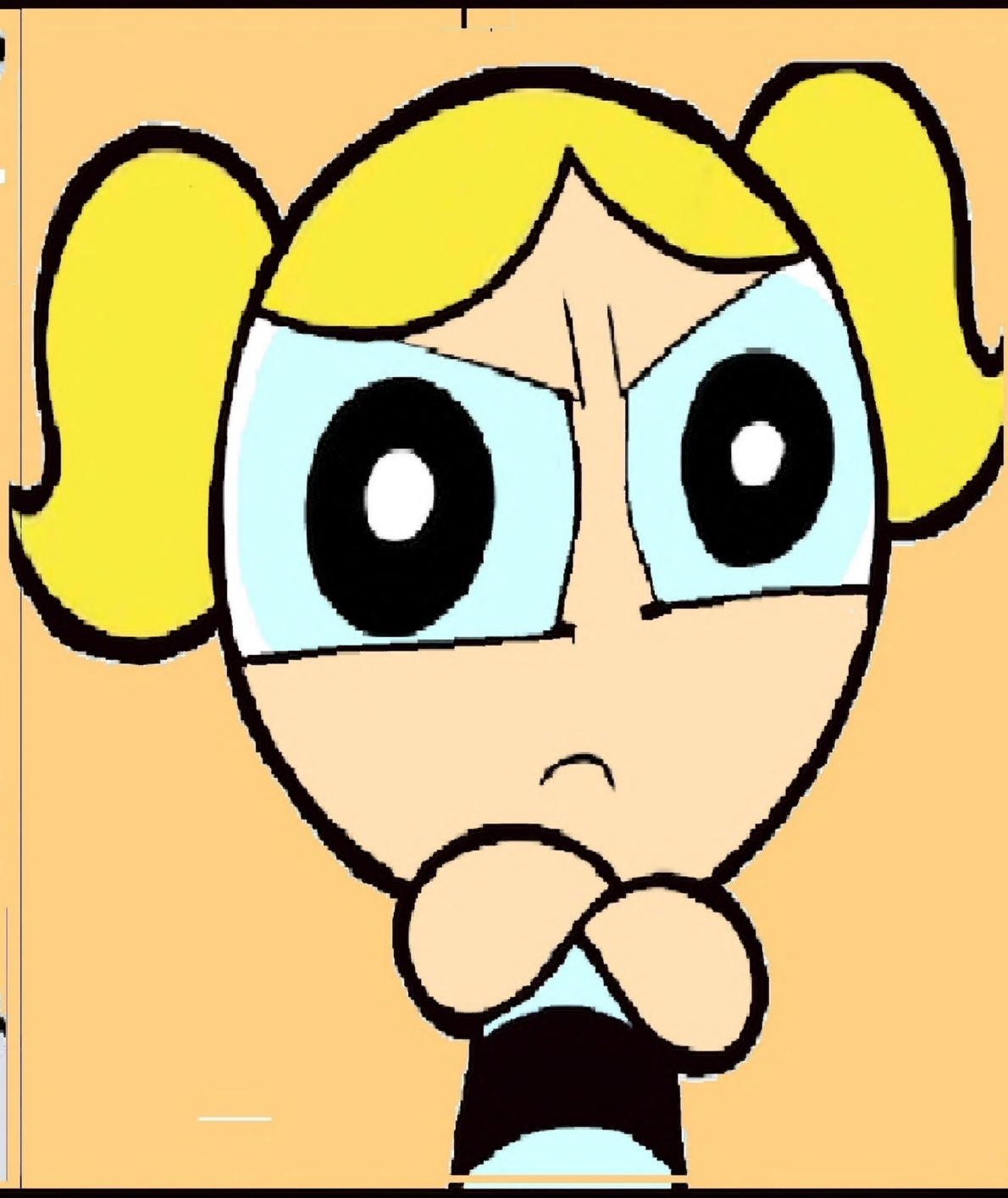

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The Return of Ishtar

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